

# THE BOOK REVIEW

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## Raja Rao: Mādhyama and Mantra

### The 60th Anniversary of Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938–1998)

Braj B. Kachru

#### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The year 1998 is the sixtieth anniversary (śaṣṭipūrti) of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. One way to offer him my *śraddhāñjali* ('token of salutation') is to discuss briefly one of the liberating *mantras* from the book—its vision and its far-reaching significance. Rao presented this *mantra* in the formative years of creativity in Indian English. This, I believe, is the occasion to place that *mantra* in a broader historical context and to study its emancipating impact on creativity in English in South Asia and beyond. In 1937 [published in 1938], Rao told us regarding writing in English that "the telling has not been easy" since "one has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (vii).<sup>2</sup> This dilemma is between *mādhyama*, the medium, and *mantra*, the message—the channel and what it conveys. The medium represents "an alien language" and yet, Rao adds, English is "not really an alien language".

This explanation, and its elaboration, is articulated in the "Author's Foreword" (vii–viii) of less than 500 words—just 461, to be exact. It is these 461 words I would like to discuss and contextualize here. In retrospect, sixty-years later, one can argue that this Foreword as a *mantra* envisions an emerging canon, and circles the possible boundaries of its canonicity—linguistic and contextual. The Foreword outlines an agenda and became Rao's own credo of creativity: It indeed proved the trail-blazer of what turned out to be a liberating tradition in world Englishes. It was, as Parthasarathy rightly says (1987: 157), "revolutionary in its declaration of independence from English literature."

A number of sentences from this Foreword have repeatedly been quoted, analyzed, and paraphrased, both in Rao's India and in other parts of the world, where creativity in English has gradually become an integral part of the national literatures. And, as time passed, with various modifications and interpretations, the credo acquired almost the status of a manifesto in founding what, in the 80s, has been called

"liberation linguistics".<sup>3</sup> Rao, of course, did not use the term "liberation"; he did not need to. Instead, he just carved a different path consistent with his native tradition—that of convergence, cohesion, and assimilation. What he did by this *mantra*, and later, was to put around the English language the Brahminical "sacred thread," thus initiating English into India's linguistic family. It is in this subtle and suggestive way that Rao performed the *saṁskāra* ("initiation rite") and brought the English language within the mainstream of India's linguistic and cultural tradition (*paramparā*).

In this sense, then, Rao's credo was both a reinvention of the language, and a reconstruction of how it could be defined. In his reconstruction, Rao recognized the implications of three basic features of the induction of English in India's pluralistic context: the bilingual's creativity, the formal and functional hybridity of the language, and the recontextualization of a colonial linguistic weapon within the age-old assimilative linguistic history of India.

#### The Caste of English

In 1937 Rao talked of an Indian identity of English—he was presenting a vision and expressing a *kāmanā*—an intense desire. This visionary insight was, however, elaborated further over twenty years later, in 1978. In a short paper appropriately titled "The caste of English," Rao attributes a *varṇa*, a caste, to the language. He actually blends his metaphysical and pragmatic visions concerning English and places the language on the same elevated pedestal of Truth as the one on which Sanskrit ("The Perfected Language") has traditionally been placed by the Brahmins, as *devavāṇī* ("divine or heavenly language"). And Rao adds a pragmatic aspect to the language by saying, "so long as the English language is universal, it will always remain Indian":

Truth, said a great Indian sage, is not the monopoly of the Sanskrit language. Truth can use any language,

and the more universal, the better it is. If metaphysics is India's primary contribution to world civilization, as we believe it is, then must she use the most universal language for her to be universal... And so long as the English language is universal, it will always remain Indian...

It is this type of *mantra* which Rao uses to respond to the ideological and linguistic war which Thomas B. Macaulay (1800–1891) had launched over a century earlier, aiming at the soul and mind of India.

Rao is also responding to India's linguistic chauvinism, particularly that of the post 1960's, when he says:

It would then be correct to say as long as we are Indian—that is, not nationalists, but truly Indians of the Indian psyche—we shall have the English language with us and amongst us, and not as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and of our tradition.

By incorporating the language within the caste, within the creed, and within the sect, the *saṁskāra* is complete—and for Rao the Indian identity of English is complete. The initiation, the *saṁskāra*, has "liberated" both the medium and the message that the medium conveys. And now truly "the Empire talks back," reciting its own *mantra* in multiple voices.

The *mantra* is not just incantation, intoning and chanting of a word or a phrase. It is more than that. It is a medium of thought, and

it is not the conceptual, discursive, differentiating form of thought (*vikalpa*) that accompanies empirical language. This is more intense, more effective thought, a thought that is also one-pointed since it is connected with a concentrated form of speech, endowed with special potency and efficacy (Padoux 1990: 373).

This explanation of *mantra* is consistent with what has been labeled the "Kashmirian theory of *mantras*".<sup>4</sup>

#### Anatomy of the Mantra

What Rao's *mantra* regarding English does is to contextualize English within five refreshingly new perspectives.

First, there is reference to language as medium and as a vehicle of a message. The medium, as mentioned above, is "not one's own." But the spirit that the medium conveys "is one's own."

The identity is with the functions and acculturation that the language has acquired in Rao's India—the form or

substance appropriately Indianized to serve these ends.<sup>5</sup>

The second perspective concerns the daunting issues of reconciling local culture and "Thought-movement" in an "alien" language.

... thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language.

And here Rao is encountering the Whorfian dilemma. But having said this, Rao pauses, and almost as an afterthought, he reconsiders his use of the distance-marking term "alien". In reconsidering the "alienness" of English, and how it becomes "Indian," Rao says:

I used the word "alien," yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up. We are all *instinctively bilingual*, many of us writing in our own language and in English (Emphasis added).

The term "instinctively bilingual" has immense implications for our understanding of the multilinguals' language behaviour. This concept of "instinctive" bilingualism has yet to be understood in the societies where monolingualism continues to be treated as a *normal* linguistic phenomenon and multilingualism is viewed as linguistic aberration. And this latter view continues to be held in many linguistic and educational circles in the West.

I don't think that the concept of "instinctive bilingualism," or at least some inherent human capacity for multilingualism, has even now entered the theoretical conceptualization in explaining bilinguals' strategies. (see, e.g., Kachru 1996a and b, and 1997). Consider the relatively recently articulated views of social scientist Shills and linguist Crystal. Shills (1988: 560) claims that:

The national language of literary creation is almost always the *language of the author's original nationality*, there are, of course, exceptions, such as Conrad, and, at a lower level Nabokov and Koestler, Apollinaire and Julien Green. But for writing about public or political matters, a foreign language is often used effectively [emphasis added].

When asked to explain the difference between people who have native speaker awareness of a language and those who do not, Crystal's response is rather mystifying. He says (cited in Paikeday 1985: 66–67) that

it is quite unclear what to make of cases like Nabokov and the others. George Steiner (*Extraterritorial pa-*

pers) talks about as having no native language. But these are marginal cases.

And, elaborating on who is a "native speaker" (of English), Crystal continues (68):

I know several foreigners whose command of English I could not fault, but they themselves deny they are native speakers. When pressed on this point, they draw attention to... their lack of childhood associations, their limited passive knowledge of varieties, the fact that there are some topics which they are more 'comfortable' discussing in their first language. "I couldn't make love in English," said one man to me.

These views only partially reflect the contexts of creativity and proficiency across speech communities, and are particularly inadequate when considering language use in the multilingual societies around the world.<sup>6</sup>

Rao's third perspective relates to hybridity in terms of the convergence of visions when the English language is used in pluralistic contexts:

We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us.

What is called the Rushdiesque language, and defined as "a hybrid form of post-colonial and post-modern narrative discourses" by Langeland (1996: 16) has its well-conceptualized beginning in Rao. Langeland considers this aspect of Rushdie's technique (1996: 16)

as a radical linguistic operation implanting new cultural impulses into hitherto more narrowly ethnocentric language.

This was the point that Rao was addressing a decade before Salman Rushdie was born and over a generation before Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) was published.

Fourth, Rao recognized that there is a linguistic consequence of this convergence that results in formal distinctiveness of the *Indian* variety of English. He compared the situation with Irish and American English, both of which had to undergo a long struggle for what may be called their "linguistic liberation":

Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.

Fifth, hybridity results in stylistic transcreation, and here again, Rao refers to American and Irish varieties of English:

After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of others.

Thus, Rao sees that the "tempo of Indian life" must be "infused" in our literary creativity. That "tempo" is well represented, as Rao reminds us, in our literary *paramparā*, in our epics, and in the puranas—in "high" culture and the "vernacular" culture:

And our paths are interminable. The *Mahabharata* has 214,778 verses and the *Ramayana* 48,000. The *Puranas* are endless and innumerable.

And what are our conventions of discourse? What is our "culture of grammar"?

We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us—we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move to another thought. This was and is the ordinary style of storytelling.

In these five points Rao provides a context and broad features for the *Indianization* of the English language. In other words, he outlines the grammar of discourse, and emphasizes the culture that the language was gradually acquiring in India.

These five perspectives, then, encapsulate the foundations of what one sees now as emerging canons of English in its second diaspora—the Asian and African diaspora. This *mantra* authenticates the crossover of English in its altered sociocultural contexts.

The five perspectives may be summarized as:

1. The relationship between the medium (*mādhya*) and the message (*mantra*)
2. Reconceptualization of the contextual appropriateness of English as a medium of creativity
3. The relevance of hybridity and creative vision and innovation
4. The relevance of language variety, linguistic appropriateness, and identity
5. Stylistic transcreation, cultural discourse, and their relationship with local *paramparā*

The text of *Kanthapura* that follows the Foreword actually gives life to Rao's vision of creativity, and he tells us that "I have tried to follow it myself in this story" (viii): He takes up his own challenge to demonstrate that the "thought-movement" is not "maltreated in an alien language". And in his use of English, he makes a distinction between two linguistic functions—*intellectual* and *emotional*:

It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English.

In Rao's novel—his *sthala-purana*—a new linguistic tradition, a new dimension of creativity in world Englishes began to develop in the 1940s. This experimentation in creativity in English was not restricted to India. We witness various versions of such gradual—and sometimes subdued—experimentation in West Africa, in East Africa, and in Southeast Asia and the Philippines. The new paradigm for the use of the colonial language was unfolding itself, primarily with local initiatives. The earlier conceptual frameworks were being altered and set aside, and fresh initiatives were being outlined.

The credo of 1938 indeed became the cornerstone for what followed in the years to come. In different ways, and with different emphases, we hear these new voices in, for example, Nigeria's Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and Wole Soyinka; in Kenya's wa Thiong'o Ngugi; in Somali's Nuruddin Farah; and in Rao's own contemporaries in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the stylistic and thematic experimentation of post-1947 writers such as Upamanyu Chatterji, Amitav Ghosh, Mukul Kesavan, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, I. Allan Sealy, Vikram Seth, and Shashi Tharoor.

In 1982, Rushdie tells us that, "we can't simply use the language [English] in the way the British did: it needs remaking for our own purposes."<sup>7</sup> The next generation had taken Rao's *mantra* and now the *paramparā* continues.

When Rao emphasizes the term *Indian* with English, for him English is a part of the region's multilingual linguistic repertoire. And his modifier *Indian* with English is not to be understood in the sense in which it was being used in Rao's time by, for example, Goffin (1934), Kindersley (1938), and earlier by Whitworth (1907). These scholars, as I have discussed earlier (e.g., Kachru 1993, 1991), viewed Indian English primarily within the "language

deficiency" paradigms, and Whitworth (1907: 6) considered Indian innovations as "linguistic flights, which jar upon the ear of the native Englishman." The use of the term Indian English is also not identical to what poet Nissim Ezekiel has labeled his 'Indian English poems.'

Rao's creativity goes back six decades; these have been years of innovation and stylistic experimentation for him. *Kanthapura* provides the first conceptualization of Rao's view of *Indian* English, and this conceptualization continues to evolve in other distinct ways in his later writing. Parthasarathy (1987: 160) insightfully explains such experimentation as "ritually de-Anglicized English." The use of *ritually with de-Anglicization* is significant here.

In *Kanthapura* English is thick with the agglutinants of Kannada; in *The Serpent and the Rope* the Indo-European kinship between English and Sanskrit is creatively exploited; and in *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), English is made to approximate the rhythm of Sanskrit chants. At the apex of this linguistic pyramid is... *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, wherein Rao has perfected his experiments with the English language spanning more than fifty years.

What we see, then, is that each of Rao's novels in its distinct way authenticates and expands one or more aspects of Rao's 1938 credo. And each stylistic experiment appropriates, as it were, the English language on Indian terms. The Indian canon of English gains yet more energy, vitality and identity. In other words, it legitimizes itself in India's sociocultural context. The works that followed *Kanthapura* are essentially Indian in their contextualization, their multilinguality, their linguistic and cultural hybridity, and to use Thumboo's term, in linguistic and cultural "crossover."

Let me give just one example of the code-mixed texture of Rao's discourse here. Linguistic hybridity is skillfully foregrounded in his *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988). The novel brings together eight languages: three western (English, French, and Greek), and five Indian (Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi, Hindustani, and Urdu). Witness the following:

'Ca va?' answers Jayalakshmi, adjusting her necklace. 'Est-ce qu'on va le trouver aujourd'hui', he continues, the last word said with such heaviness. 'Si le Seigneur le veut.' 'Mais quel seigneur?' 'Lui,' she said with a mischievous

smile, as if thinking of someone far away, very far away.  
 'Qui donc?'  
 'Son Altesse le lion.' Of course she was speaking a lie.  
 'Le tigre?'  
 'Non,' she said, and turned to her father, asking if the mail had come. (195)

And Rao with equal ease switches to Hindi:

"Maji kahan gaye hai? Achha. Suno. Vo kab arahi hai?—Agaye? Kapada badalke arahi hai? Achha. Padu. Bye-bye" (175)

In designing the text, in incorporating language into the stream of narrative, 'instinctive bilinguality' is taken for granted. There is no concession made for monolingualism. And no textual clues are available for comprehension of Sanskrit, French, or Hindi. The burden of linguistic and cultural intelligibility and interpretation is on the reader. Consider, for example, sentences such as:

"Our alaya, the true home, is forever the Himalaya" (46);  
 "It is all prarabdha, it's written on our foreheads" (49);  
 "for either you touch suffering, and so suffer, or reach to the other side, and be it.  
 One is kashta and the other dukkha" (84);  
 "A brahmin should not touch jhoota, especially, my jhoota" (130);  
 "And so you and your beads, and the sorrow. Dukkha me dukkha milaja" (108).

The "mixing" and "switching" plays distinctive stylistic and identity roles in his writing and it is much more marked in *The Chessmaster and His Moves* than in the earlier *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960). In the former, the glossary includes 336 words, as opposed to just 27 in the latter.

One linguistic device that contributes to what had been termed Rao's metaphysical style is his aphoristic use of language. One is tempted to say that in such use the medium is English, but the underlying thought-process is almost Vedantic. Rao is adept in the process of transcreation from Sanskrit. Note the following examples,

"To be is to is-to-be nowhere" (48).  
 "To be is to know, but to know is rarely to be" (63)  
 "Going in non-going" (55)  
 "Not to be is truly to be" (95)  
 "Death's death is what death seeks" (104)  
 "To belong you must be lost" (143)

"The essence essences essence" (162).

If *Kanthapura* was his first specimen of the implementation of his credo, the conceptualization of Indian English, the full range of such experimentation is found in his later works.

In his lexicalization from India's languages, Rao follows a somewhat different path than his contemporaries Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, and Ahmad Ali. It is not just lexical foregrounding, but it is part of discursive cohesion—an integral part of the style. The incorporation of Sanskrit words is one device that Rao uses for the metaphysical and Vedantic contextualization of the narrative. This type of Sanskritization of discourse results in the linguistic dilemma of establishing translation equivalence between Sanskrit and English. What Rao does is to include in the stream of narrative *semantic sets* of the following types:

Adi Seshu, "The Primal Serpent";  
 advaita, "non-dual"; ahankara, "I-ness";  
 ahanta, "emphasis on personal I";  
 agnana, "ignorance"; anaman, "nameless"; bhavati, "becoming"; dhih, "intellect"; ka, "light"; prana, "life-breath";  
 samsara, "cyclic becoming or existence";  
 satvic, "pure"; tapas, "austerity"; and yoga chakra, "the subtle nervous system."

#### Structure as the Puranic Form

In his structural conceptualization of the text, Rao again looks back to the tradition, to the *paramparā* of *sthalā purāna*. In other words, to recreate English within that tradition of "legendary history." Whether Rao has been successful in doing so can be judged by critics who are competent to do so. Rao, however, does recognize that it is India's Puranas and epics that provide ideas for structural frameworks to him: the conventions of *Kadambari* (eighth century) by Bana, and *Uttararamacharita* (eighth century) by Bhavabhuti. One is, therefore, not surprised that Rao regrets his inability to write in Sanskrit. And he often talks about it with nostalgia.

In 1997, in *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947–1997*, Salman Rushdie, commenting on "the generation of independence, 'midnight's parents'" of Indian English rightly calls them "the true architects" of new tradition (e.g., Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao). Rushdie considers Rao "... A scholarly Sanskritist, [who] wrote determinedly of the need to make an Indian English for himself, but even his much-praised portrait of village life, *Kanthapura*, seems dated, its approach at once grandiloquent and archaic" (1997a: xvii). These are, of course, broad and sweeping generalizations. But then, a few pages earlier (p. xi), Rushdie is

honest when he says that some readers (of the anthology) may feel that "we are simply betraying our own cultural and linguistic prejudices, or defending our turf, or—even worse—gracelessly blowing our own trumpet" (xi).

In the same volume, Rushdie, however, does echo Rao's observation of 1938 that "Indian English, sometimes unattractively called 'Hinglish', is not 'English' English, to be sure, any more than Irish or American or Caribbean English is." The achievement of the writers is "... to have found literary voices as distinctly Indian, and also as suitable for any and all of the purposes of art, as those other Englishes forged in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies, and the United States" (1997a: xiii).

In Rao's "Author's Foreword" to *Kanthapura* he says that "our paths are interminable." And he elaborates:

We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us—we tell an interminable tale.

Rao, as indicated above, has no hesitation in violating the traditional conventions of English punctuation, capitalization, and sentence construction. In the traditional orthographies of Indian languages there are just *vīrām* and *ardhāvīrām*, one represented by one vertical line and the other by two such lines. There are, therefore, no rules of Fowler's prescriptivism for Rao, though Fowler had acquired the status of a linguistic Bible in Colonial Asia and Africa.

In *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, for example, Rao is indifferent to the conventions of English punctuation, capitalization, and sentence and discourse organization. There are sentences of one page (264–65) and even one-and-a-half pages in length (501–2). There is a conscious attempt to extend the Indianness of the language by de-emphasizing its "alien" canonical conventions—the Judaeo-Christian conventions, the range of linguistic and contextual associations that identifies English with western canons. What Rao does is to put India's English on the same linguistic pedestal as Sanskrit, which has been in Rao's native India for the past thousands of years. And Rao does it on his own terms. That is what he had envisioned in 1938 when he said that

Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

What Rao said in 1938 in those four

hundred and sixty-one words was both visionary and prophetic. It was the first conceptualization of canonicity of India's English. It was visionary in more than one sense. In his approach to imperial English he was creative and assimilative. He questions the pragmatics of the exocentric model; argues for the legitimacy of nativization of English, and justifies the acculturation of Imperial English to give it an Indian identity. In other words, he locates the language in India's linguistic and cultural space.

#### Rao's Creed in a Historical Context

In the historical context of world Englishes, the crosscultural spread and emerging new identities and canons of English, Rao's credo was indeed, to repeat Parthasarathy, "revolutionary." In the 1930s, and until much later, Imperial English continued to have a firm grip—attitudinal and symbolic—on all world varieties of English. One has to make a distinction here between attitudes toward the Received variety of English and actual performance in the variety. In literature it has been shown that even in the USA, UK and other Inner Circle countries adherence to the Received model has been an exception and not a rule. And in recent years "the loose canons" are aggressively seeking their legitimate linguistic rights in that mythical circle. But that is a different story.

One might ask: What were the views on linguistic liberation" and experimentation in Rao's India and beyond in the 1930s? What was the context of English in the Outer Circle (Anglophone Asia and Africa)? Rao made these observations just nineteen years after Henry Louis Mencken (1980-1956) published his monumental, *The American Language* (1919). In his first edition of the book, Mencken claimed that

Americans spoke a separate language of their own making that they could take pride in, not an imperfect imitation of the language of England (McArthur 1992: 651; see also Kahane 1992).

The stirring for an identity had just begun in the USA, but Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were still not seeking an autonomous linguistic identity in any serious sense. The story of English in the Outer Circle was essentially one of English as the tool of the Empire: The Empire had yet to become articulate in English. It is true that bilingualism in English had gradually gained momentum, but there was still no recognition of the types of crossover and markers of new linguistic and cultural identities for the language.

A parallel example of the linguistic—and cultural—appropriation of English by the natives of the Outer Circle would be that of Africa. However, in the 1930s, the Africanization of English and its exponents of identity had yet to be established. We see the first articulation of that in a most skillful way in, for example, Amos Tutuola in the 1950s and Chinua Achebe in the 1960s. That is almost three decades after Rao's Foreword. The insightful argument of Achebe about "how I approach the use of English" reveals the most skillful argument of a literary craftsman. In making a case for the Africanization of English, Achebe contrasts the Africanized version with "another way"—the non-Africanized way. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1966), the chief priest, explaining to one of his sons the importance of sending him to church, says to him in what may be called the Africanized version:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something then you will bring back my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying "had we known" tomorrow.

Then Achebe contrasts this with another version—a non-Africanized version—and asks, "Supposing I had put it another way. Like this for instance":

I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

In support of the first version—the African version—Achebe provides a pragmatically and contextually valid argument. In his view:

the material is the same. But the form of the one is in character, the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct but judgment comes into it too.

The two crucial words here are "instinct" and "judgement": the first relates to the African "thought-pattern" as transcreated into English and the second to pragmatism with reference to the African context. In Achebe's de-

cision, we see that African "thought-movement" has not been "maltreated in an alien language." Indeed, Rao would agree with Achebe.

What we see is that each African and Asian English-using country adopts a strategy relevant to its own context, contexts of culture and patterns of interaction. The processes of Englishization have been almost identical, but the specific linguistic innovations have varied in each region—West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, South and East Asia. The search has been toward the same end—to seek culture-specific cultural identity through the medium of English.

The most passionate articulation of this position is in Wole Soyinka, who emphasizes that English plays "unaccustomed roles" in Africa and has thus become a "new medium of communication." This medium functions in "a new organic series of mores, social goals relationships, universal awareness—all of which go into the creation of new culture".

Soyinka expresses the Africanization of English very differently from Rao when he says that:

Black people twisted the linguistic blade in the hands of the traditional cultural castrator and carved new concepts into the flesh of white supremacy.

In this metaphor there is both passion and anger—the medium is an active weapon. And what used to be "the enslaving medium," as Soyinka sees it, has been converted into "an insurgent weapon." In other words the acculturation and Africanization of English has been complete. The process which Soyinka explains in a way answers Gabriel Okara's (1963:15-16) question:

Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way?

The identity issue is not restricted to Asia or Africa—far from that. We see it in the USA too. The result is what Gates, Jr (1992) calls "the culture wars" for the identity of "the loose canons".<sup>8</sup>

#### The "Loose Canons" and other Canons

What are the responses to the canons of creativity in English in what was the Empire? What is the reaction to what Rao's 1937[1938] credo has unleashed? The reactions have been of two types. The first reaction is that the multilingual's creativity in Asia and Africa has given the English language a

unique vitality, innovation, and cultural expansion. It has given it a pragmatic legitimacy. The result is what may be called a "multicanons" of English—actually, Englishes. It has indeed rejuvenated the medium and rescued it from exhaustion. The other reaction is almost the opposite of that, as demonstrated in, for example, the attitudes and concerns of Bailey and Quirk. I have discussed it in detailed elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

The on-going debate about diluting the canon and keeping "loose canons" out on the periphery is only one side of the current debate on English. Rushdie (1991:61) encountered this attitude when a specialist in *English literature*, "... a friendly and perceptive man" suggested to him that:

[as] a Commonwealth writer... you probably find, don't you, that there's a kind of liberty, certain advantages, in occupying, as you do, a position on the periphery?

This *periphery* is one way that defines a Commonwealth writer in English. At a seminar in Cambridge, a lady from the British Council reassured Rushdie that "it's all right, for the purposes of our seminar, English studies are taken to include Commonwealth literature." (1991:61) And Rushdie continues that:

[at] all other times, one was forced to conclude, these two would be kept strictly apart, like squabbling children, or sexually incompatible pandas, or perhaps, like unstable, fissile materials whose union might cause explosions (1991:61).

Rao's *mantra* of the Indian reincarnation of English is one perspective. The debate about English in India, initiated with Macaulay's Minute of 1835, has continued unabated. There are more than two sides to it. Consider, for example, views expressed in reviews. These views present two distinct visions and two distinct responses to Rao's *mantra*. First, the ecstasy of an Indian journalist, N.S. Jagannathan (1996):

And the most important means that both the rulers and the ruled used for transforming the Indian mind and imagination was ironically, the English language. It was through it we had access to western (read English) ideas and imagination. And Sanskrit literacy among even educated Indians being what it is, it was through English that the majority of them discovered their own intellectual history including that part of it inscribed in Indian languages un-

known to them. Even anti-British nationalism was nurtured by English, a fact often forgotten by Macaulay-baiters assailing the hegemonic hold that the West has even today on our thinking.

Second, the agony of an Indian educator, R.C. Gupta (1996):

The ethical questions: 'How and by what logic should we continue to impose English language on our young learners? and 'how much damage are we doing to the Indian languages and to the self-esteem of their speakers by our continued insistence on the teaching of English as an integral, nay essential, part of our curriculum?—are not asked even by one contributor.

#### Rao's Mantra and Caliban's Canon

There is no paucity of theoretical, ideological, and pragmatic perspectives and analyses on the consequences of the introduction of English in Colonial Asia and Africa. And each label, each epithet, and each characterization represents an underlying attitude and a vision of a nation, nationhood, and national linguistic identity. These identities reflect in the use of attitude-marking terms for English such as *Auntie tongue*, *Trojan horse*, the *Other tongue*, *Step daughter*, and so on.

The most suggestive and loaded metaphor indeed is Caliban's tongue. It symbolizes how Caliban acquired a voice and used it as a linguistic weapon. It also symbolizes the Imperial attitude toward Caliban and what he represents. The language was used for the spiritual, moral, and educational elevation of Caliban—Asia and Africa were the White Man's burden.

But not for Rao. He does not use any such metaphors. There is no Caliban here, nor is Rao using English from the periphery. He brings English, and its functions, to the center of his creativity, to the center of *Indianness*. In his hands, the crossover of the language is on Rao's terms.

In *Kanthapura's* foreword, Rao makes a calm assertion of the instrumental use of the English language without the anger and agony of Nigeria's Wole Soyinka or the accusation of racism against the English language of Kenya's wa Thiong'o Ngũgĩ. There is no conscious linguistic overlay of, for example, Mulk Raj Anand (1998), nor is there any "radical linguistic operation" of Salman Rushdie (cited in Langland 1996:16):

The (English) language... needs to be decolonized, to be made in other images, of those of us who use it from positions outside Anglo-Saxon

culture are to be more than artistic Uncle Toms. And it is this endeavour that gives the new literatures of Africa, the Caribbean and India much of their present vitality and excitement.

When asked, "Why does Rao use English?"<sup>10</sup> his response is consistent with the historical context of the period and within the assimilative linguistic tradition of India's past. He says:

Historically, this is how I am placed. I'm not interested in being a European but in being me. *But the whole of the Indian tradition, as I see it, is in my work.* There is an honesty in choosing English, an honesty in terms of history (Emphasis added).

Rao prefers the medium of English for pragmatic reasons too:

In English, it seems as if one can do what one wants with the language. There are fewer rules, it's a newer language, and therefore has more freedom for invention (145).

And he contrasts English with French:

I lived in France for a long time and know French almost as well as I do English, but this freedom is not available in French at all. French is so strict a language that there is hardly any freedom there (145).

We see the same view shared by Rao's younger contemporary, Anita Desai. Her "material" is "Indian" and she "had to bend it and adapt it somehow to the English language." Desai continues:

The reason I'm so fascinated by the English language is that it's really possible to do this with English; it is flexible, it is so elastic. It does stretch, it does adapt, and it does take on all those Indian concepts and traditions and ways (171).

The canon formation had begun with Rao and it continues in various ways in the post-colonial Indian writing in English.

#### Conclusion

The vision Rao presented in 1938 for India's English "as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American" has actually come true, especially during the Post-Imperial period. It is so meaningful that in 1988 Rao revisited the question which he had raised—almost as an aside—sixty years ago. In *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, he brings in another facet, that of the contempo-

rary English of his native India:

Today of course what one speaks in India called English is a vernacular, and will someday grow like Urdu, taking its own rhythm and structure (189).

And then Rao Provides an Indian "meaning" to his contextualization, adding that:

We in India welcome everything outlandish and offer it to the gods, who taste it, masticate it and give it back to us as *prasādam* ["offerings to the gods returned to man sanctified"]. When our English will have come to that maturity it might still achieve its own nationhood. Till then it will be like Anglo-Norman, neither French nor English, an historical incident in the growth of culture. After all, and we forget so easily, sister, India is hallowed with wisdom, antiquity, and history (189).

Once English acquired the ritualistic sanctity of *prasādam*, the earlier dichotomy that Rao suggested in 1938 between the *emotional* and *intellectual* make up ceases. Indian English becomes an integral part of *being*—being an Indian.

We have seen several visions concerning canons of world Englishes—the South Asian, the East Asian, the West and East African, and the African-American. Rao's vision of 1938 is far from Caliban's vision, or Caliban's anger or his revenge. And in Rao's hands language is not a weapon. There is no remorse, there is no revenge.

You taught me language, and my profit on't  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!<sup>11</sup>

For Rao, English is linguistic *prasādam* and he enjoys it, he celebrates it. It is consistent with his native *paramparā*. In a recent evocative book entitled *Empire of the Soul: Some Journeys in India*, Paul Roberts says (1996: 271) that after

Independence, however, Indian English said farewell to British English and began a life of its own. The British had shipped back a rich hand of linguistic booty over the years, too; many commonly used words... were the offspring of what Khushwant Singh termed promiscuous couplings with Indian languages. Home alone, Indian English became even more flirtatious among so many exotic tongues, rapidly

evolving into a form as distinct at times, say the Irish English of James Joyce, or the richly varied American English of Damon Runyon, or Thomas Pynchon, or Alice Walker.

Roberts has missed the mark, in a way Indian English said farewell to British English in 1938 when Rao wrote his credo for creativity.

And as the years have passed, we see that Rao's *mantra* established a subtle connection between the English language and India's linguistic and cultural *paramparā* and its assimilative literary culture. It took English over half a century to become an exponent of India's literary culture. In this way, Rao authenticates what he said later—much later—in an interview,

the important thing is not what language one writes in, for language is really an accidental thing. What matters is the authenticity of experience, and this can generally be achieved in any language.<sup>12</sup>

What Rao's *mantra* did was to create what has been called "unselfconsciousness" about English, about creativity in this language, about *Indianness*. The new generation of Indian English writers such as Vikram Seth are celebrating it. He says:<sup>13</sup>

Many Indians have become quite unselfconscious about the use of English. It doesn't have colonial associations for them. They use it as freely as their own language.

The various modifications and elaborations of Rao's *mantra* thus provide us with early insights regarding "canon expansion" in world Englishes. These insights have to be contextualized within the literary and linguistic theoretical conceptualizations of the time—from the 1930s to the 1990s. What happens beyond the millennium is not easy to guess—the crystal ball is still very misty.

In literary terms, the influence of the Romantics was dominant in the 1930's. The concept of transcultural and multilingual creativity, and resultant canons, was yet to be established in English. Forester (1970) succinctly explains the context:

... we have all been brought up to believe that each language has its mystery and its soul, and that these are very sacred things, in whose name indeed much blood has been shed in our own lifetime and is still being shed. ... [I]f we put sentiment aside, there are very many people and very many situations for which

different languages are simply tools appropriate to certain definite purposes, analogous to the different stylistic levels within any one language.

This attitude resulted in what Lefevre (1990: 24) has called the attitude of "monolingualization" of literary history. He says it is:

another pernicious outgrowth of the "monolingualism" of literary history by Romantic historiographers intent on creating "national" literatures preferably as uncontaminated as possible by foreign influences.

In linguistic conceptualizations, as Haugen (1950: 272) reminds us, the attitude toward bilingual's creativity conveyed psychological and linguistic marginalization. What we see, as Haugen says, is that "... both popularly and scientifically, bilingualism was in disrepute." Haugen makes a poignant observation that "just as the bilingual himself often was a marginal personality, so the study of his behaviour was a marginal scientific pursuit."

It is within the context of such a literary and linguistic theoretical vacuum that Rao's *mantra* has to be contextualized. In canon-formation in world Englishes, in constructs for such creativity, and in understanding the bi- or multilingual's linguistic behaviour, Rao's *mantra* insightfully reminds us that language is merely the *mādhya*.

In multilingual's creativity, as Rao rightly observes, what language one writes in "is an accidental thing." The important things is the authenticity of experience." Rao believes that one can express one's "experience" through the *mādhya* of English. He, Rao adds, "found English to be the nearest equivalent to ancient Sanskrit as it has almost the same range of varied expression, suppleness, and adaptability to different modes and effects and similar richness and complexity."<sup>14</sup> Rao found French "... far more disciplined and precise. It allowed less room for experimentation which he had to do to adapt a western language to his eastern sensibility."<sup>15</sup>

It is in this way—a pragmatic way—that Rao authenticates the formal and functional *Indianness* in Indian English. It is such authentication that contributed toward developing "strategic constructs" for the Indian canon of English. And it is through such constructs, to use Kremode's concept,<sup>16</sup> that a *paramparā* is established, and that is what Rao did by using the subtle device of the "sacred thread" that Indianized the English language. It laid the foundation for the later genera-

tion—for example, the Rushdie generation and “Rushdie’s children.”<sup>17</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at a symposium on “Word as Mantra: The Art of Raja Rao,” at the University of Texas, Austin, Texas, USA, on March 24, 1997.

<sup>2</sup>I have used the New Directions paperback edition of *Kanthapura* published in 1967. The book was first published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, in 1938. Rao’s “Author’s Foreword” is dated 1937.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed discussion see, e.g. Kachru, 1991, and 1996.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Padoux (1990: 372). For further analysis of literature on this topic see also Alper, ed. 1989; and Gonda 1963; and Padoux 1988.

<sup>5</sup>For references on English as a medium of plural canons and other related issues see Kachru 1997.

<sup>6</sup>See Kachru 1995b.

<sup>7</sup>For other perspectives see also Dissanayake (1985), Kachru (1986, and 1991) and Thumboo (1992).

<sup>8</sup>See Gates Jr. 1992.

<sup>9</sup>See Kachru 1991 and 1996a.

<sup>10</sup>See Jussawalla and Dasenbrock (1992: 144). William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Caliban, Act 1, sc. 2.

<sup>11</sup>See Jussawalla and Dasenbrock (1992: 147).

<sup>12</sup>Interview published in *India Currents*, June 1993, 7(3): 20.

<sup>13</sup>Cited in Srivastava 1980: 106.

<sup>14</sup>Cited in Srivastava 1980: 105–106.

<sup>15</sup>Cited in Altieri 1990: 22.

<sup>16</sup>See Amitav Kumar’s review of *The God of Small Things* (Arundhati Roy) and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (Amitav Ghosh) in *The Nation* (New York) September 29, 1998; Vol. 265, Number 9: 36–38) with the caption “Rushdie’s children”.

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Successive volumes in the second, post-Independence series of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* are becoming more and more interesting as the months and the years pass. These are basically different from the *Collected Works of Gandhiji* for example, which contain a whole range of writings from newspaper editorials to friendly informal letters to every stranger who wrote to him. In Nehru's case in the earlier pre-Independence series, there were some letters of this type but now the large majority consists of confidential cables, notes of colleagues in the Cabinet and officers in the Ministry of External Affairs and speeches made in both Houses of Parliament and to the ordinary people of India in maidans all over the country. Intimate personal letters form only a very small portion of the book. But they make all the difference. The old care-free years of irresponsibility are echoed in, for instance, the letters to Jaiprakash Narain and, of course, Krishna Menon. Then there are the letters to the Chief Ministers, as many as six of them, during the brief period of three months between 25th July and 17th October, 1952, covered in this volume. They have been published earlier a few years ago under the editorship of G. Parthasarathi. When placed in the context of the discussions of current domestic and foreign policies, these letters are extremely useful. The total picture which emerges from each volume is a very clear detailed impression of the working of the Government of India at the decision making level, and also its dilemmas and challenges. The careless reader might, very often, miss the wood for the trees but the editing is so comprehensive and the footnotes so useful to situate the letters and notes in the proper perspective that it gives an almost

physically immediate impression of history in the making. No other country has attempted a task as ambitious as this.

During these three months in 1952 Kashmir looms prominently. The State Constituent Assembly is in session and Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah have the beginnings of divergence of views on important matters. There is also the question of the removal of Maharaja Hari Singh and the working out of a formula for replacing him by his son, Yuvraj Karan Singh. There are some very interesting letters to the young prince faced with difficult choices. Curiously enough the dialogue with the King of Nepal, Tribhuvan Singh, about the problems created by his son, reflect the same ability on the part of Nehru to appreciate personal dilemmas. Nehru's difficulties with Kashmir are familiar enough. The reference to the U.N. in 1947 had not produced the anticipated results. While not saying it in so many words Nehru justifies the decision in retrospect in spite of the subsequent negative experience. He was very much influenced by his faith in the United Nations as a superior alternative to the futility of the League of Nations in 1938



which he had observed while in Europe. Of more permanent importance was the question of fundamental human rights in the state of Jammu and Kashmir which was brought forward by critics of Nehru and Abdullah on the State's legislation against the Zamindari System. In Kashmir, legislation was much harsher than in other parts of India. Nehru found no difficulty in accepting the compulsions of Abdullah and the State Government. In the United Nations negotiations, Dr. Graham, in Geneva, came to the conclusion that no immediate progress was possible. Asked about his views on the U.N. document at a press conference, Nehru politely said, "Dr. Graham's report is a good factual report and there is nothing more in it." In his letter to the Chief Ministers on the same subject he more or less repeated himself... "Dr. Graham's report has just been published... There is nothing very new in it and the position remains more or less where it was. So far as we are concerned we can expect no major change in the position we have taken up. We have gone as far as we can possibly go." Dr. Graham himself reported to the Security Council his failure to effect an agreement between India and Pakistan on de-militarization in Kashmir before a possible plebiscite. We are, here, at the beginning of a long barren record of more than four decades.

These were the months immediately after the finalization of the First Five Year Plan and the beginnings of the Community Development Projects. These were times of hope for Jawaharlal and his advisors. This was also an important example of U.S. influence in economic planning at the grassroots level in India. After all one of the permanent influences on Nehru during the thirties was Roosevelt's New Deal

and the successful manner in which he tackled the great depression. Two other subjects of continuing relevance to the immediate present for us are the role of the Governor in the States and the question of the Privy Purses of the former rulers in the States. The episode on the Governors is minor but interesting. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a very senior Congress leader, had been appointed Governor of Madhya Pradesh. He had a sense of humour and, in his public speeches, ridiculed the pomp and ceremony, and the essential emptiness of his new role. Nehru was not amused. He explained to Pattabhi that he depended, to a great extent, on the objective, impersonal reports sent by the Governors of various States. They would supplement the dispatches from the State Governments. The question of Privy Purses bothered him. He did not criticize Patel and V.P. Menon for the arrangements they made at a difficult moment but he felt that these had to be short-lived as also the institution of the Raj Pramukh. These were months of very bad drought and famine in Rayalaseema and Nehru rediscovers his old self in touring the affected regions and talking to the people. He goes to several districts near Madras and spends some time in Hyderabad. Like in the old days he was recharging his batteries. Some of the problems are, of course, perennial. There is an inevitable but essentially minor episode about the differences between Mysore and the Madras governments on the distribution of the Cauvery Waters. The Prime Minister tries his best to persuade the Mysore Government to fulfil its obligations under the Agreement which dated back to 1924. The results of his efforts would, perhaps, be known in the next volume. There is, however, not much scope for optimism.

There is a brief reference to Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a government servant and an employee of the All India Radio, who had just published the *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Nehru is upset at his attitude towards India and its government. "If he is such an admirer of the old British days and British ways, he might find a more congenial atmosphere elsewhere." He, however, made it clear that he was not suggesting that he should be given notice to depart but he felt that "we require some kind of an explanation from him". Obviously, the mini crisis was contained and Nirad Babu continued to stay on in the government for several more years.

The section on Foreign Affairs is expectedly interesting. There are developments in Nepal, Pakistan and Egypt which required the Prime Minister's attention. In the case of Nepal Nehru is concerned with the continu-

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ing recruitment of Nepalese Gurkhas in the British Army in Indian territory. He was surprised that this had been going on for some time and wanted to have a second look at it. The discussion is, however, moderate and unexcited. In Pakistan the problem was the continuing exodus from East Pakistan which went back to Nehru-Liaquat Agreement of 1951. There was a change of government by a military coup in Egypt and India was immediately interested only in protocol problems about our recognizing Egypt's relationship with Sudan. About the two Germanys, East and West, Nehru was very clear that because of the principle of continuity we should have full diplomatic relations only with West Germany. This was a decision which would be revised only in the early seventies after the two Germanys had sorted out the problem.

Of more fundamental importance to India was the border problem of Tibet in China. The Indian Ambassador, Sardar K.M. Panikkar, had advised that we should not bring up this subject. He argued that India's position on the frontier with Tibet was well-known to China. Since the Chinese Prime Minister had not raised the border issue in his interviews with him, his silence should be presumed to be acquiescence, if not acceptance, and it was wisest to ignore the subject. Nehru's own first feelings were divergent. In a note to the Foreign Secretary dated 25th July, 1952, one month after Panikkar's telegram, he said: "I am inclined to think that in our future talks or notes about Tibet we should mention the frontier. I appreciate the reasons which Panikkar advanced.... but I am beginning to feel that our attempt at being clever might overreach itself. I think it is better to be absolutely straight and frank." One of the sad 'might-have-beens' of the Nehru era.

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tation in these successive volumes will be of crucial importance to research scholars. Letters to the Chief Ministers and the internal notes in the government confirm the earlier impression most of us had about the essential transparency of Nehru's style of government. There is one caveat, however. Even forty years after the event there may be communications and notes which are not considered "safe" enough for publication. But we should assume that most of what is available has been published. The new documentation supplements the major speeches on most subjects in the Parliament and elsewhere which Nehru made during his long years of office and which have been published in several volumes. The real problem is the inevitable slowness of the publication of these volumes. We cannot have more than two to three volumes per year. Each volume deals with only three or four months. There are twelve more years to go till 1964. We should expect the series to be complete at the present rate only by 2010. One wonders whether it would be possible, in the meantime, to publish in separate volumes Nehru's speeches, notings and communications on major issues of India's foreign policy like Kashmir and India's relations with Pakistan, China, U.S. and western Europe. If a parallel project could be launched for this purpose and a number of research scholars deputed to carry out this task it would be most useful for projecting the country's foreign policy down the decades. All of Krishna Menon's speeches in the U.N. on Kashmir, Disarmament, and Colonialism have been published. He was, after all, only implementing Nehru's policies. It is most important to have first-hand knowledge of Nehru's thoughts. In this present volume, just for example, the Minutes of a Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Cabinet with the Kashmir Delegation have been published. It is in the form of a detailed note drafted by the Prime Minister himself. These discussions bring about the essential bona fides of India's approach to the question. There are bound to be occasions when we have been a trifle disingenuous. But that does not matter. The total picture would be most useful in reiterating today India's case of its most vexed foreign policy problem in an open and essentially credible manner.

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## Honey On The Tongue

K.S. Dhillon

FOUL PLAY—CHRONICLES OF CORRUPTION

Edited by Shiv Visvanathan and Harsh Sethi

Banyan Books, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 341, Rs. 400.00

Strangely not many scholars and social scientists have shown much interest in probing the nature and extent of corruption in Indian society in a scientific manner despite the growing volume of evidence indicating that the malady has now infected almost all spheres of our national life. It has clearly developed into a near omnipresent and omnipotent phenomenon in the country's power-structure. Having struck deep roots in the body-politic this hydra-headed monster acts as a strangle-hold in all the decision-making processes not only in governmental ministries and departments but also in most other segments of the economy and business. No developmental initiative in the public or private sector, no official or non-official policy, no growth scheme, no financial, trade, business or market activity is immune from this malodorous and cancerous contagion. It is only recently that the deeply baleful impact of widespread venality on the country's economic and political health has been fully realized by alert sections of our intelligentsia and empirical, sociological, historical and administrative studies undertaken to fully grasp and highlight the intricacies and complexities of the malaise of corruption as an intrinsic part of modern Indian polity. The exponential broadening of the governmental charter of responsibilities, consequent upon the adoption of state planning as a system of development and the increasing involvement of the executive in economic activity, opened up innumerable new and virgin avenues of dishonesty and distortions in public life. The unchecked expansion in bureaucratic hierarchies aided in several ways to widen the base of improbity and the reach of the venal official.

The book under review fulfills a long-felt need for a comprehensive but eclectic study of the anatomy and pathology of corruption in Indian society. In adopting the case-method of narration, the authors have greatly enhanced the quality and value of this perceptive

work in a rather complex and difficult area. Cases have been selected from a wide range of governmental, public sector and private enterprises to pinpoint the near universal prevalence of underhand, manipulative and dishonest practices in all spheres of national endeavour and developmental processes. From Pratap Singh Kairon and Krishna Menon in the early post-independence years, through the Emergency excesses; the Shah Commission probing those excesses; crime, terror and corruption of the Mumbai Mafia; corporate manoeuvrings and decay in SAIL, Telecom, Maruti and financial jugglery in I.T.C. and the loot in securities and shares by Harshad Mehta et al., many major scams and scandals involving the high and mighty as also the rich and the famous, have been deftly and thoroughly uncovered. Nehru's stubborn reluctance to deal with and discipline many of his close friends and colleagues who came under deep suspicion in the very first decade after the dismantling of the empire perhaps laid the foundations of the phenomenal escalation in corruption and venality in Indian public life in subsequent decades. It is unclear whether his unshaken faith in Kairon's dynamism, Krishna Menon's patriotism or Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed's loyalty to the Indian case in Kashmir, sprang basically from his passionate drive to accelerate India's development and progress at whatever cost or simply from naivety. It is somewhat odd that he failed to withdraw support or patronage even when the blemishes of improbity in

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his proteges and favourites became all too glaring. Thus he continued to tolerate the 'bosses' in the Congress Party even when some of them were known to be making a pile on the sly. The same class of leaders would later form what would be called the 'syndicate' and confront Nehru's daughter in a different context.

By positioning these chronicles of corruption in a deep historical perspective, the editors have helpfully provided a much-needed insight into the philosophical, cultural and psychological sinews of the phenomenology of corruption in pre-colonial Indian society. The final chapter titled 'Cultural Soundings' very vividly delineates the core dichotomies between attitudes, approaches and thought processes in respect of the concepts of honesty and dishonesty, integrity and venality, neutrality and partisanship etc. in the Indian and western framework of values. The conflict between the traditional charismatic-patrimonial style of governance and the rationalist-legalist systems of European political philosophy (Burke, Bentham, Mill) remained unresolved throughout the major period of British rule. The bulk of the Indian people continued to feel puzzled at the unfamiliar and unorthodox stance adopted by early British rulers to their age-old beliefs about such personal matters as caste, untouchability, widowhood, pollution, contentment etc. Showing favours and helping the 'biradari' (clan), which was an obligatory part of the exercise of power in the Indian (oriental?) tradition, was decried by the new government as 'nepotism' and considered a form of dishonesty. Many other western practices also left them baffled. It was not till well into the 19th century, and specially after the cataclysmic events of

1857 that a modicum of insight into the oriental mind was precipitated by the diligent labours of several erudite scholars and researchers who dedicated themselves to a thorough study of the classical texts and scriptural literature of the subcontinent. In the process, the concepts of the rule of law and due process, which were essential ingredients of Macaulay's vision of an ideal system of administration also went through a process of metamorphosis. However, the durability of these essentially western concepts, enforceable through western jurisprudential procedures, would come to be seriously questioned in all the subcontinental nations soon after the end of British rule.

The slow process of erosion which began soon after Nehru's death would acquire a much faster pace and velocity with Indira Gandhi's Emergency and thereafter. The post-Emergency climate of licentiousness and disregard for legal and procedural norms which soon took root in the polity would later blur all distinctions between right and wrong, proper and improper, lawful and unlawful and spawn several scams and scandals of mind-boggling proportions in every sphere and aspect of national activity, some of which have been so graphically described in this seminal study.

One can well conceive of the hazards and risks involved in a study of contemporary history. The conclusions are capable of being challenged by the protagonists of the episodes unless the writer's views are firmly based on unassailable material. In any case, since some of the cases are still under investigation or sub-judice, the scope for controversy is obviously quite ample. One can be sure that the contributors and editors would have gone to great lengths to be doubly sure of what they narrate and meticulously researched their theories and subjects. The book displays a high level of analytical ability and a sharp comprehension of complex social and political phenomena. Obviously each contributor is a specialist in the subject he deals with. Written in a gripping, lucid and sensitive style of narration, the range of vocabulary employed to express events, concepts and shades of thought is indicative of learning and maturity. Each word is chosen with great care and circumspection in ensuring accuracy. The book is well brought out with several innovations in its production.

*K. S. Dhillon, a former director general of Police, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh, is the author of Defenders of the Establishment: Ruler supporting Police Forces of South Asia (1998).*

## Indian Police—A History

K.F. Rustamji

DEFENDERS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT—RULER-SUPPORTIVE  
POLICE FORCES OF SOUTH ASIA

By K.S. Dhillon

Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas,  
Shimla, pp. 290, Rs. 300.00

**A**nalytical studies of government and its institutions, by scholars, so abundant in the western world, are a somewhat uncommon feature in South Asian countries. While American and European Universities and institutions of higher learning have been regularly producing high-calibre research work in the area of public administration, our own scholastic community has by and large been avoiding such initiatives, and has generally failed to engage in serious and meaningful research in this direction, though of late some welcome change is noticeable. Among governmental departments, police has attracted the least attention for obvious reasons. One can hardly think of a work on the Indian police to compare with, for example, the seminal studies of British police history and philosophy by Charles Reith and others which have, in no small measure, enhanced the world's knowledge and understanding of that fascinating force.

In the Indian context, David Bayley's *The Police and Political Development in India* (1969) remains a classic and the only authoritative work on many aspects of the Indian police, though some of its conclusions, such as that "the police have played a neutral role as mediators" (p. 411) are no longer valid with increasing politicization since the early 1970s completely transforming the nature of police organization in India. With few exceptions, among them the very well-researched work in two volumes by A.S. Gupta, most available literature on the Indian police consists merely of memoirs and reminiscences of police administrators and although the latter do provide insights into the organization (e.g. Griffiths 1971, Lobo 1992, Venugopal 1993) most of these books are anecdotal and rarely go beyond personal narration and make little attempt to make a systematic study of the police departments. Some other studies are informative but have a limited focus. The eight volume reports of the National Police Commission (1978-81) are comprehensive and comparable

to the reports of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice-1967, in the U.S.A. Unfortunately the former are not widely available and have not been seriously looked at by scholars. Also, in the fast changing political and social environment in India, most such studies soon become dated.

It is in such a context that Kirpal Dhillon's work on the history of the subcontinental police from ancient times to 1947—the year of India's (and Pakistan's) independence and partition—deserves to be studied. In an endeavour to situate the police forces of South Asia in their ruler-supportive role in a deep historical perspective, the study breaks fresh ground in several significant ways. As a perceptive analysis of the evolutionary brick-work on which were built the foundations of the present-day sub-culture and attitudinal framework of South Asian police, the book assumes extraordinary importance. This book should help promote a process of social introspection by presenting a historical paradigm to it.

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The police in the Indian subcontinent though of a much older vintage, but essentially a product of the Indian Police Act of 1861, continues to be frozen in a mindset heavily coated with mid-nineteenth century values and attitudes, suited more to a colonialist regime than modern democratic polities.

The evolution and growth of most Asian and African police forces was primarily determined by the demands, and the influence, of colonial powers to serve their own alien interests. The police in the Indian subcontinent though of a much older vintage, but essentially a product of the Indian Police Act of 1861, continues to be frozen in a mindset heavily coated with mid-nineteenth century values and attitudes, suited more to a colonialist regime than modern democratic polities.

The entire corpus of criminal law and the justice system itself remain substantially Victorian in concept and design and heavily redolent of mid-nineteenth century flavours, thus proving to be an uneasy instrument to meet the needs of an end-of-the-millennium society. Dhillon wades through the whole course of the history of institutions, both social and political in the Indian subcontinent from the historically obscure ancient times through medieval ages to the considerably better documented British period to make his point: that *South Asian Police forces have always been ruler-supportive and never citizen-friendly*. Starting with an exposition on the evolution and institution of the police in the Indian context, he goes on to explore its growth and development during the subsequent periods of Indian history till independence in 1947. The chapters dealing with the British period are understandably more elaborate and informative. The prolonged labours of the Indian Police Commission of 1902-03 are covered in great detail to bring out the growing chasm between public expectations from the police in a climate of rising social awareness towards the end of the nineteenth century and the requirements of an imperialist government for a repressive and efficient agency for perpetuating their hold on the 'Jewel in the Crown'. Curzon with his characteristic dynamism and vision,

sought to sharpen and re-shape the Indian police strategies and responses by rushing through draconian legislation and administrative measure so as to make the police, not the army, the mainstay and prime defender of the Indian empire and the establishment. By giving a concrete structure and design to what was later to grow into the Intelligence Bureau and provincial Special Branches and strengthening the concept of armed police units, he ensured that the South Asian police would always be in the forefront in quelling nationalist upsurge and would grow from strength to strength to keep pace with the spread and sweep of the Indian freedom struggle. The rapidly unfolding political developments after the arrival of Gandhi as the supreme leader of the Congress party, the growing communal cleavage between Hindus and Muslims, leading to ever escalating sectarian riots, the so-called Pakistan Resolution of 1940, the Quit India agitation and the pre-Partition rioting and killings have all been described with an extraordinary clarity and precision. The book also contains a wealth of data about crime, police strength and expenditure figures of various stages of its development during this century.

To quote from the foreword by John Alderson, an eminent British officer himself, who has taught police subjects in British universities for over a decade, "Dhillon is a writer whose communicative skills enable him to speak effectively to the world's police and police administrators. He is politically astute as this book bears witness. But at all times his criticisms are fair and being a man of great moral courage, he avoids undue reticence in expressing them". With increasing interaction between the world's police forces and the growing intermeshing of criminality across the world, there is need for more perceptive literature on the police of various countries and regions. Dhillon's work should go a long way in filling a gap in international police literature. Since the book is the product of a study he undertook while working as a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, he has been able to add a scholarly approach to a wealth of experience gained over a period of three and a half decades in the I.P.S. A fairly detailed epilogue tries to lend topicality to the book by narrating some important events between 1947 and 1997. One hopes this would, in the not too distant future, be converted into a full-fledged book.

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## Determinants of Fertility

K. Saradamoni

KERALA'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION, DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Edited by K.C. Zachariah, S. Irudaya Rajan

Sage, 1997, pp. 367, Rs. 450.00

Demography was understood as the study of populations and the decennial census reports of India prior to our Independence contained much more of descriptive information than what they contain since Independence. However, apart from the several volumes of numbers of the people based on age, sex, occupation, religion, rural/urban and similar characteristics, the census authorities also bring out a large number of special reports or monographs. Over the years there have been changes in definitions causing difficulties in comparison. However, it would not be a mistake to say that the data produced by the census in the last one hundred years or so are not yet fully used.

The contours of demography have changed and the scope of the discipline have broadened. This can easily be seen from the contents of the book under review, *Kerala's Demographic Transition: Determinants and Consequences* edited by K.C. Zachariah and S. Irudaya Rajan, two active demographers in the State. The topics the volume covers include besides demographic transition, low birth weight and the need for nutrition for pregnant women, rethinking on the relation between education and fertility and migration. These should be of interest to all social scientists, planners, medical personnel and concerned citizens.

Population and all the attributes given above are very important in understanding Kerala as they are important ingredients in the much publicized 'Kerala model'. In simple words the latter means that the state has achieved considerable progress in the social sector though the performance in the economic front is in no way satisfactory. The statistics that are used to support the above are a sex-ratio favourable to women, female literacy, low infant mortality, longevity, acceptance of small family norm etc. besides such things as primary health centres, land reforms, social security initiatives and above all a politically conscious,

alert people. Kerala's demographic transition has received much acclaim independent of the Kerala model. Here again, literacy and education mainly of women, good family planning delivery and certain historical developments peculiar to the state are found to be the reasons. However, in the papers presented in the volume one can see that the exuberance demographers used to show earlier has given place to more cautious and careful observations. More than one person has observed that the state has experienced a rapid decline in fertility in the recent past. "As per the current fertility levels women will have an average of two children each during their child bearing years, indicating below replacement level fertility. Fertility differences by urban-rural residence, education, religion and scheduled caste/scheduled tribe have also been declining."

Both the causes and consequences of the demographic transition which the state has witnessed has also been enquired into, though it is neither easy nor correct to come to any categorical conclusions. Radha Devi comparing Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, asks the question, Is there any link between education and fertility? and comes to the conclusion that factors other than education—what the author calls the socio-cultural milieu in which a person lives override the individual education characteristics in determining fertility.

R. S. Kurup in his study on Low birth weight and need for nutritional care for pregnant women tries to highlight an issue which has failed to attract sufficient attention. The data for the study were collected from two hospitals in Thiruvananthapuram. Surprisingly the hospital records which did not show the addresses of pregnant women made it impossible to follow up the cases after the women were discharged from the hospital. The author tries to draw some tentative conclusions. The low weight of babies could be caused by lack of sufficient nutritional food while pregnant and that

When we say that women and the level of literacy they have attained have influenced them to desire 'quality children' it can also mean that the poor women wish their children to have a slightly better life than what they had or that they were fully conscious about the dire future awaiting their children.

could be the result of insufficient income in the family. While his focus is on poor families we have information from economically strong families where also the phenomenon occurs. We have to look for other reasons too. One, pregnancy by and large has ceased to be seen as something normal. On the other hand, from very early stage of pregnancy, doctor's advice is sought. Just as in the case of an ailment, medicines are taken from very early stage. All those can have their consequences.

Another aspect of Kerala's demographic transition is the rise in the proportion of the elderly in the population. Irudaya Rajan and his colleague U.S. Mishra who were pursuing this question for quite some time discusses the various sides of this issue in their paper 'Population Ageing: Causes and Consequences'. As in the case of many other things Kerala can claim to have initiated several programmes to help the aged. There are fully paid government run institutions for the economically weak among the aged. There are private institutions too catering to the well-to-do as well as the poor. There are plenty of persons to whom the idea of the elders bring segregated does not appeal. Many feel unwanted at home and outside, others do not have any sense of purpose in their lives. It is high time that the societal attitude to the aged change and the latter are treated as essential part of the society, people with full rights to live as responsible citizens.

The papers under the topic migration deal with three different aspects. While one paper examines the migration of peasants from Travancore to Malabar in the early part of the century the other two focus on migration to the Gulf countries which is a relatively recent phenomenon. There again one of the authors who studied the women left behind by the migrants found that the former learned to cope with the new situation, when they have to take decisions and manage domestic (in-

cluding financial) matters. However, the author warns that it would be callous to suggest a path like male overseas migration, for the empowerment of women. The third article in this section, Economic Consequences of Gulf Migration, though not strictly focused on the demographic side points to the absolutely essential need to reschedule development priorities in the state. The paper ends with the following observation: 'The seriousness of the economic situation in the state has been camouflaged by the remittance inflows and rising levels of consumption. The dependence on remittances has also introduced an element of uncertainty into the socio-economic scenario'. The paper adds that emigration and remittances alone cannot break down the structures of under-development. It is nearly half a decade since this was written and one does not see any change in the scenario. In a state where a sense of right is exhibited by the people practically everywhere, they have not yet established their right to work or to receive gainful employment.

This takes us back to something which we constantly hear, viz that the state has performed extremely well on the social sector which is missing in the economic front. When we say that women and the level of literacy they have attained have influenced them to desire 'quality children' it can also mean that the poor women wish their children to have a slightly better life than what they had or that they were fully conscious about the dire future awaiting their children. They agree to prevent the birth of such children without knowing the full impact of the various methods they use to prevent pregnancies, even on their own body and health. And how many women of this class have seen their dream come true relating to the one or two children they give birth to? I am yet to see a study on this.

The book under review has touched upon a large number of issues and has placed before the readers several questions to pursue.

The papers in this volume were presented in one of the sub-themes in the International Congress on Kerala Studies organized by the AKG Centre for Research and studies in August 1994 at Thiruvananthapuram. There were several dozen sub-themes where nearly fifteen hundred participants discussed a large variety of issues. This is the first volume I have seen where the papers of a sub-theme in the above congress have been put together. The editors deserve appreciation.

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## Documenting Environmental Regimes

Manju Chellani

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW: BASIC DOCUMENTS AND SELECT REFERENCES

Compiled by Najmul Arif

Lancer Books, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 635, Rs. 750.00

Environmental issues are entwined with the life of each human being all over the earth, sometimes in the most unexpected ways. Concern for the consistent deterioration of our environment has grown dramatically in the past few decades and is here to stay. It has increasingly been reflected in the mounting public opinion, which has pressurized governments, especially in the West, to demonstrate efforts towards the preservation of the environment. The response of the lawmakers to these pressing concerns has been the introduction of unusually dynamic legislations to combat pollution of seas and rivers, to conserve endangered species and to regulate disposal of hazardous wastes, among many other challenges.

However, the expectation that domestic legislation alone can deal with environmental problems has long been recognized as being unrealistic. It is a trite observation that water and atmosphere know no boundaries. Any change in their quality reflects outside the geographical boundaries. Environmental disasters related to acid rain, desertification, depletion of bio-diversity and global warming have provided unmistakable proof of this over the years. These have respected no demarcations between continents and languages; and can be battled with only by uniting efforts on a global level. Initiating corrective environmental measures burdens an individual nation's economy, placing it at a disadvantage in the world market. Hence the cooperation between countries and adoption of common standards and regulations, which are hallmarks of international law, become desirable which, more than any other branch of international law, has responded by shaping its volume and stature to the increasing demands made upon it. A large corpus of conventions, principles, agreements etc., has been developed by the international fora in the past few decades.

As lawyers, activists and researchers know only too well, a chronological documentation of the major and not-

so-well-known legal instruments is one of their most necessary requirements. The texts are generally available but obtaining each from its individual source is time-consuming and expensive, hence a good compilation of the same is so useful to those working in the domestic and international arenas of environmental law. Compilations by western authors are available in India but most of them are priced prohibitively for Indian libraries and individuals. The need for a compilation which is handy, comprehensive and affordable, has been felt for a long time.

The book under review has taken a step towards fulfilling this need. It is a collection of instruments of international environmental law, compiled by Najmul Arif. It is second in the *Environmental Law Series*, under the general editorship of Prof. Rahmatullah Khan. As Arif says in the preface, "This compilation contains carefully chosen international instruments dealing with environmental law including "hard and "soft" law." For most purposes all such compilations have to be read together with existing and developing customary international law, if a complete picture of the contemporary interrelationships is to emerge.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I—"General Principles"—contains the instruments which deal with environment as a whole. These include: Declaration of the Permanent Sovereignty Over National Resources, 1962; Declaration of the United Nations Conference as the Human Environment, 1972; World Charter for Nature, 1982; The Hague Declaration on the Environment, 1989 and Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992. Part II comprises sections which take up individual issues, Antarctica, atmosphere, bio-diversity, desertification, endangered species, forest, hazardous waste transportation, industrial accidents and wetlands. Part III—*Implementation, Enforcement and Financial Mechanism*—documents the texts of The Global Environment Facility 1991 and Instrument for the Establishment

A welcome addition in Part II would be a section on nuclear risks. Its nexus to environmental damage is obvious and its implications in international environmental law cannot be emphasized enough.

of the Restructured Global Environment Facility, 1994. The part-wise classification is a refreshing point of departure from the usual issue-based classification.

In total, this compilation gives twenty-nine entries, including a few protocols. In a work of this kind, the compiler has to sift through a plethora of the existing literature and decide upon the inclusions in accordance with the selection criteria. True, the criteria differ with the nature of the objectives and the intended readership, but in this case, some very significant instruments have been left out. The reason for this or the selection criteria in general has not been made clear anywhere in the compilation, contrary to the standard

practice. Some conspicuous omissions are the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, 1979 Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Pumping of Wastes and other Matter, 1972 and International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994. Most of them are well-known global instruments which have contributed in moulding the international environmental law to its present shape. It is interesting to note the Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests, 1992 included here which is not easily accessible otherwise, as also a few other entries in the compilation. But since Arif has stated that the main agenda of this book is to serve as a useful research tool, the above-mentioned absences do blunt its edge. Nor do we find here the instruments originating from the European Union or other regional arrangements. These may not be strictly international in nature but nevertheless have considerable value as *opino juris*. They have certainly served as guidelines for the evolution of present-day thought in international environmental law. For instance, Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and National

Habitats, 1979; African Convention as the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1968 and ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Nature and National Resources, 1985 are as significant to a student of international environmental law as the premier international instruments.

A welcome addition in Part II would be a section on nuclear risks. Its nexus to environmental damage is obvious and its implications in international environmental law cannot be emphasized enough. Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident, 1986 and Convention on Nuclear Safety, 1994 generally do find a place in the contemporary standard compilations of international environmental law.

As a "useful research tool", it is to the credit of this compilation that full texts of all the entries have been reproduced, as distinct from "considered significant" excerpts, common in many similar standard (western) works. In the same vein, Arif has provided select references at the end of each section. Majority of these refer to articles in reputed journals. One cannot help wishing that the array of authoritative works by individual authors and international organizations had also found their representation here, providing a bird's eye-view of the burgeoning en-

vironment jurisprudence.

Again, in keeping with the aim of the book, all cross-sections of the readership would have benefitted even more from it if a concise background of each entry had been given before its text; e.g. its *raison d'être*, formulation-history, its place in the existing legal framework, list of member-states, related documents, its envisaged utility and importance. Still more important, the date and place of adoption of each instrument should have been included; perhaps on the lines of the first book of the series *Environmental Laws of India*.

This hard-bound compilation is set in a visual-friendly format. Some typos have managed to escape proof reading. The reviewer hopes for other important pieces of information in the next edition e.g. the locations of *travaux préparatoires*, relevant United Nations General Assembly Resolutions etc.

The importance of this compilation lies in being the first indigenous one of its kind. We look forward to the further publications of the *Environmental Law Series* of which the present compilation is a part.

*Manju Chellani is working for a Ph.D. degree in the Faculty of Law at the University of Delhi; the area of her study is animal rights.*

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## The Meek Shall Inherit The Earth

Gagan Gill

THE SEA AND OTHER STORIES

By Ram Kumar. Translated from Hindi by Alok Bhalla.

Published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1997, pp.144, Rs.160. 00

Not long ago, while interviewing Ram Kumar, the distinguished Indian artist at work, for my book *A Journey Within*, focussed on his oeuvre, I had remarked, "In all your figurative paintings, the protagonists look out of the canvas. They are never seen looking at each other and they never have their back to the viewer. The feeling is as if all relationships were missing on that side of the canvas, and whatever relationships may be possible, is possible only when the viewer returns their gaze, making up for the missing link..." And in his typical elusive manner, Ram Kumar had responded, "There was no mystery intended in showing them that way..."

And now, some years later, as I read his fiction again, that sensation of hopeless alienation grips me again, as if even though this feeling may have left his canvases after he moved on to the Banaras phase and eventually found the peace of a mystic in his nameless abstracts, it still permeates the world of his writing. It is a delicate spot where his protagonists stand—reasonably away from the point of neurosis, yet precariously close to despair.

Who is Ram Kumar, the story-teller? And the painter? Is there a third Ram Kumar, too? The one who comes up on the surface only in his personal notebooks? (I know him because he allowed me to know him when I was putting together *A Journey Within*.) Which basement is he in? Where can one possibly look for him? Ram Kumar is as quiet as his paintings and as sparsely worded as his stories. For sure, the clues ought to be somewhere there—if not in the text, then perhaps in the unwritten subtext. He is one of the few contemporary artists who challenge your curiosity so deeply by their understatement. The more enigmatic they are, the farther you wish to go after them.

It is fascinating to see the progress of Ram Kumar, the pilgrim. Over the years, his relationship with the visual art has become non-wordy, without figures and without titles. But has something gone quiet in his writing too? Yes. The present book *The Sea and Other Stories*, translated and competently introduced

by Alok Bhalla, and elegantly published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla bears that out.

Long before Ram Kumar became the distinguished artist that he is today, he was a much loved writer of Hindi. He had begun publishing his short stories in the language magazines some time in the late 1940s and by as early as 1953, he had published his first book, a novel, *Ghar Bane Ghar Tute*, about the plight of refugee families after Partition. It came out from the leading publishing house Radhakrishna Prakashan and that must speak for the seriousness with which he was considered by the Hindi literati way back. It will be of interest today that it was his meagre earnings from the contributions he made to the Hindi journals that saw him through in Paris, (in those days Indian rupee could be freely exchanged in the international market, it was four rupees to a dollar), as he learnt his craft as an artist at the atelier of Fernand Leger, one of the great French masters of this century.

Perhaps it is this which makes Ram Kumar's writing life, too, very mystifying—for he has never really ceased to be a writer. "I attach more importance to literature," he had said in that conversation, "It is sad that I could not devote as much time to writing as I had wanted to." A modest statement, considering that there is a wealth of writing done by him, two novels, one book of travelogues, nine books of short stories, and numerous articles scattered over in Hindi journals on his painter colleagues. The only thing that overshadows his fine writing is his celebrity status as a

**Ram Kumar is as quiet as his paintings and as sparsely worded as his stories. For sure, the clues ought to be somewhere there—if not in the text, then perhaps in the unwritten subtext.**

painter. And who will grudge this more than he himself?

*The Sea and Other Stories* is a collection of seven short stories taken from different periods of Ram Kumar's writing life, (one wishes, original dates of their first appearing in a book form were given), and what makes it truly striking is the discretion that has gone into its selection.

Almost all the tales represented here are well known stories of Ram Kumar, and although they are narratives of assorted situations, a familiar undercurrent runs through all of them. From a hurtful incident of the childhood, to the troubled moments that haunt most Indian father-son relationships, to tense situations where they become so because love is never talked out loud—they are all tales of emotional displacement / estrangement, with invariably, always, a frozen painful moment in their heart of hearts.

These are the stories of the weak, and the meek. How one day, it will be they who will have the final word. The protagonists here simply don't speak up. It is as if they submit—willingly and hopelessly—to an overwhelming wave coming to engulf them. Not that they don't ask their questions. In fact, it is this inner turmoil they go through that makes them so memorable. As if all this while, the drama were taking place at two places. *Outside* the strong, the domineering, the bully, wins. *Inside* the weak watches, watches his own suffering, making the victory look so petty, so absurd, so ridiculous and unbecoming.

And where does this lead them? Almost always, they emerge wiser, stronger, clearer in their mind and soul about their place in the world. The intriguing aspect of all Ram Kumar's stories is—this change may not happen within the time of the story, but—somewhere in the neighbourhood of that instance. For example, a story like *Reva* cannot happen twice. The weak will not be weak forever. If nothing else, in the act of recounting will be their redemption. Here is *Reva*, this young girl, who is liked so much by the women in the family that they want her to be a part of it by making a match, first with the eldest visiting brother who is in the army (he rejects her), then arranging the match with the middle brother who actually loves her (this too is foiled by the domineering father), and finally, the distraught girl is being consoled by the youngest brother. A story peopled by hapless characters. And what does one see?

"It struck me that her arms were wrapped around her knees in the same way as Manjhale Bhaiya's arms were wrapped around his head when he slept at night.

There was some kinship between the two."

Quite a visual detail. And perceptions like this colour most crucial scenes. In another powerful story *Termites*, the son sees the reflection of his father looking at him in the mirror, as he puts the razor to his face—and shudders. The perspective of a painting is often used to make the literary structure of a situation taut. Even as the tales end on an inconsolable note, they leave behind a graphic trail of subtle nuances of human behaviour.

In a way, all Ram Kumar stories are about lost moments, and how one may never make amends for them, harder though he may try, in the rest of one's years. Many a time, it is their inherent withdrawn nature that makes the characters damned. Most love situations are troubled because that love is not demonstrated. It is as bad as love lost. Most of the times, it is somebody other than the loved one, who knows that love exists.

For instance, in *Termites* it is the mother who knew how much the father cared for his family, the son only resents him. In *The Sound of Crickets*, it is first the mother, then the servant, then a visiting girl friend of the son who knows the depth of father-son bond. Left to themselves, they hardly communicate. In both the situations, it is Father, Son and an insurmountable Silence. Even in a story like *Shilalekh*, where once the protagonists had struck perfect harmony, the relationship is doomed. The extraordinary thing about these stories is that even when there is some bitter moment in the relationship, there is also some very tender moment that binds them together. Not in the real time, but in remembrance. And it is that which makes it hurt more. Tenderness haunts them as much as grievance.

Absence seems to speak much more to the characters than the actual presence ever did. Absence that is made of longing, memory and an innocuous visual detail. It is a play of human beings acted out in a barren landscape. It is a show that has gone on for ages. It is the landscape of God. Ram Kumar only recalls the spectacle in his stories. Hence, when Ram Kumar says, "Sometimes I want nothing to happen in my paintings", one must know, it is not an unambiguous statement. It can only come from someone who has been in the thick of it all.

Nothing can be overwhelming. And who would know it better than Ram Kumar? All Ram Kumar's art is about that.

Gagan Gill is a poet and critic. She has published two books of poems and edited Ram Kumar - A Journey Within.

## Letter from London

Stephen Moss



**B**iographies are a source of endless conflict. Who has the right to sum up a life? What is the value of an authorized biography? How should an individual's legacy be judged? Two recent books have reopened the arguments—a life of the TV playwright Dennis Potter by Humphrey Carpenter and a biography of the novelist Marguerite Duras. Two controversial lives containing complex "truths" that are now being fought over by relatives and writers.

Potter, who died in 1994, is a difficult subject for a biographer. He was a confessional playwright who wrote from life, but not, he insisted, slavishly. He sought to probe the workings of the mind—its self-deceptions, confusions, occasional shafts of understanding. The lesson should be a daunting one for a biographer, and it is not lost on Carpenter, the chronicler of lives as complex as Ezra Pound, Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden. Here he is describing Potter's apparently autobiographical novel *Hide and Seek*: "[It] seems to have been devised as a trap for Potter's biographer, whose research was bound to reveal that he had had an appointment with a psychiatrist at an old London hospital, made confessions that he had been with a certain number of prostitutes, and at the same time idealized women sexlessly. The novel lies in wait for the discovery of these facts, which seem to disclose the 'real' Dennis Potter. Its message seems to be: 'I have been playing hide-and-seek with you. You think you are writing my life, and I am leaning on your shoulder, writing it for you. You, even you, are a character in my story. I can manipulate you too.' Even though the biography is billed as having been 'authorized'—the family had some say in the choice of biographer, but no control over the content of the book—Potter's daughter, Sarah, has castigated Carpenter as 'lazy and sloppy'. She has taken particular exception to Carpenter's conclusion that Potter did indeed, as he

had confessed to friends, employ the services of prostitutes. She dismissed the notion as "absolute tosh" and said that her father was a fantasist who enjoyed playing mental games with his friends.

Her dismissal of Carpenter's conclusion is arguable—most of the evidence points to Potter having been telling the truth when he made his confessions—but her contention that the biographer has failed to capture the truth of her father's personality is undeniable. There is no sense of a multifaceted human being here, just a relentlessly troubled man fuelled by work and sexual neurosis.

Carpenter had obvious difficulty with an incident in which Potter's uncle sexually abused him as a 10-year-old. Potter described the experience in varying degrees of luridness, sometimes saying it was crucial to his psychosexual problems, sometimes not. Carpenter, while acknowledging its influence, is never quite sure what weight to give it, and is usually content to quote exhaustively from all the often conflicting interviews in which Potter mentions it.

Carpenter tends to stand back and let the material—Potter's work and letters, the reminiscences of friends—speak for itself. But that makes for a fragmented narrative and an incomplete portrait of the man. It is the worst of both worlds: Carpenter is clearly most interested in Potter's sexual hang-ups and his problems with women, rather than his work, but he fails to marshal his evidence into a coherent portrait of the playwright. He simply parrots Potter's own delusions, contradictions and sexual obsessions.

France has recently gone through its own biography battle, with Laure Adler's book about the celebrated author Marguerite Duras, who died in 1996. The parallels with the Potter biography are striking: Duras used her own life story in her novels, but much embroidered; she had a series of com-

plicated relationships with men, one of which her biographer interprets as prostitution, another she paints as Vichy collaborationism; and Duras's family are outraged by the book—her son called the allegations "unbearable" and said the interpretation of the relationship with a Gestapo officer was a distortion.

The Duras book has not yet appeared in English, so I must for the moment suspend detailed judgment. From the reports I have read, it appears thoughtful, by no means merely an exercise in muck-raking, but schematic, guilty of the besetting sin of biographers—the desire to impose order where none exists, to seek logic and causality where human beings act on instinct.

Alain Vircondelet, who had an affair with Duras and wrote a biography of her, doubted whether a definitive account could ever be written. All interpretations were valid, he suggested, because "she invented her own life and legend". The critic Pascale Frey made a similar point: "Marguerite Duras's entire existence was packed with contradictions and ambiguities."

A truly great biography will allow for those contradictions, rather than attempt to iron them out in pursuit of a simple conclusion or saleable headline. Lives aren't logical; often we deceive ourselves; what we say and what we do can be very different. Potter and Duras, complex and highly self-conscious writers, emphasise the irreducibility of a life.

Biographies are popular with publishers, who see them as attractive to both book-buyers and the media. Publishers are shameless about producing instant biographies of current stars which have little or no intrinsic value. Similarly, they have no compunction about playing up the most scurrilous aspects of those subjects' lives at the expense of the broader picture of a life.

That is publishing, that is journalism, and when family members complain it is all grist to the publicity mill. But we should be aware that the "truth" of a life is desperately hard to find and express, and that honesty, assiduousness and perhaps sympathy are all necessary if a biography is to be taken seriously. There are too many hack biographies, too many commercially driven biographies, perhaps too little humility among biographers. Biography is the hardest genre; biographers and publishers seem to want to persuade us it is the easiest. For the art to be mastered, it really is—as Boswell discovered—a lifetime's work.

*Stephen Moss is literary editor of The Guardian.*

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# The Man Who 'Knew Infinity'

Rishi Srinivasa Iyengar

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAN: A MATHEMATICAL GENIUS

By K. Srinivasa Rao

East West Books, Madras, 1998, pp. 231, Rs. 175.00

**A**s a student of mathematics who probably rates 0.5 on Hardy's famous scale, it is not inappropriate that I review this book. For even I, philistine, have been captivated by Ramanujan's strange and beautiful formulae. Consider:

$$\frac{1}{1} + \frac{e^{-2\pi\sqrt{5}}}{1} + \frac{e^{-4\pi\sqrt{5}}}{1} + \dots = \left\{ \frac{\sqrt{5}}{1 + \sqrt{\left\{5^{3/4} \left(\frac{\sqrt{5}-1}{2}\right)^{5/2} - 1\right\}}} - \frac{\sqrt{5}+1}{2} \right\} e^{2\pi/\sqrt{5}}$$

"This must be true, for if [it] were not, no one would have had the imagination to invent [it]." However, most people that I have met view Ramanujan as 'symbolic of conditions in India'.<sup>1</sup> His story is in some way India's story.

At first sight, I was not impressed with Srinivasa Rao's book. It seemed a hagiography in the style of a CBSE textbook: important points in bold and capitalized. Fortunately, I got over this rather patronizing prejudgement as the extent of the author's research became clear.

Robert Kanigel's moving account of the 'man who knew infinity' contained only glimpses of mathematics. This is not the case with *Srinivasa Ramanujan: A Mathematical Genius*. Much of his work, particularly his letter to Hardy, receives attention here; the fascination of his mathematics becomes apparent. It also refutes the dismissal of number theory by a teacher as 'mere calculation'. There is also a great deal of new and absorbing material, especially that relating to 'S. Chandrasekhar and the influence Ramanujan had on his life'. In his Foreword, Bruce Berndt states that the book 'significantly adds to our knowledge about Ramanujan'.

The work is 'an attempt to provide a brief introduction to the life and work... of Ramanujan'. To this end, the book is divided into seven sections, or chapters, dealing with his life, glimpses of his mathematics, the famous Note-books, Hardy and Chandrasekhar on Ramanujan, the interestingly titled 'Books and Busts', and a comprehensive listing of the location of materials pertaining to Ramanujan's life.

The Biographical section is not the best feature of the book; perhaps the experience of reading Kanigel leads one to unreasonably high expectations. In any case, there is the usual information, dramatic enough, on the events and people in Ramanujan's life. Of some interest is the history of Janakiammal, his wife. That said, there is no question that the comments and experiences of the many people who met and were influenced by Ramanujan have been meticulously documented. This is particularly true of the Indians from this period.

It is the next section, titled "Ramanujan's Mathematics: Glimpses", that is also the best. Results from every period, usually of direct relevance to his most important work, is represented here. This balance comes as no surprise, for K. Srinivasa Rao is himself a mathematician of some distinction. The theorems inevitably leave one with the sense that 'not only are such results fascinating, but for the most part, Ramanujan's methods remain a mystery'. Some idea of this mystery can be had from a remarkably accurate formula for  $\pi$ :

$$\frac{1}{\pi} = 2\sqrt{2} \left\{ \frac{1103}{99^2} + \frac{27493}{99^6} \cdot \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1.3}{4^2} + \frac{53883}{99^{10}} \cdot \frac{1.3}{2.4} \cdot \frac{1.3.5.7}{4 \cdot 8^2} + \dots \right\}$$

While Rao's target here is the mathematically inclined, those with altogether different proclivities could read this section, to their benefit. The presentation is elementary and lucid, and an understanding of Ramanujan cannot be reached



without some idea of his work; it is this work that stands to contradict the arrogant presumption that aesthetics, clarity, elegance and intuition are the realm of 'the arts and humanities'.

Ramanujan's Notebooks are, with Newton's 'Waste Book' and the diary of Gauss, among the most extraordinary set of documents in the history of mathematics. While the Notebooks are 'naturally unequal in quality', they are rich in ideas that have found their way into many practical and theoretical fields of thought. For the pure mathematician, Polya's reaction tells its own story.

"One day... Polya... borrowed from Hardy his copy of Ramanujan's notebooks. A couple of days later, Polya returned them almost in a state of panic

explaining that however long he kept them, he would have to keep attempting to verify the formulae therein and never again would have time to establish another original result of his own."

The enormous task of editing the notebooks—proving the results or indicating where the proof might be found—was largely accomplished by Bruce C. Berndt; his task was completed only about a year ago. Prof. R.P. Agarwal's work on the notebooks also receives extensive attention.

The most important figure in the life of Srinivasa Ramanujan was Godfrey Harold Hardy. He gets his own chapter. I made the interesting discovery that the Hobbs class<sup>2</sup> of mathematicians was, in fact, only second best, for, "Bradman is a whole class above any batsman whoever lived; if Archimedes, Newton and Gauss remain in the Hobbs class, I have to admit the possibility of a class above them, which I find difficult to imagine. They had better be moved on from now into the Bradman class."

Further, a footnote says, A.E. Trott has an average of 102.50—but he only played in 5 innings. The 'Trott class' does not seem to have the same ring about it.

Once again, the significant parts in this section relate to the twelve Harvard lectures delivered by Hardy on Ramanujan, high in mathematical content. Valuable insights are gleaned from the recollections of Indian mathematicians. For instance, S.R. Ranganathan notes that Hardy's reaction to the notebooks was very similar to Polya's.

In "Chandra and Ramanujan", an address 'On Ramanujan', delivered at an International Conference held to mark Ramanujan's birth centenary is reproduced, and this also relates the story of the founding of the Ramanujan Institute. It also turns out that it was Chandrasekhar who was instrumental in recovering, from Janakiammal, the only authentic photograph of Ramanujan and sending it to Hardy. Chandrasekhar's correspondence in this regard is reproduced. The unnecessarily controversial account of Ramanujan's attempted suicide, in the recounting of which Chandrasekhar's motives were questioned, has been given. It was Chandra's feeling then that 'it should be published sometime'. Rao has reprinted the account, citing Janakiammal's death as his reason.

This book has been written as 'an introduction', but it is more than that; Srinivasa Rao has produced a complement to the biography by Kanigel. It serves as a reference point for deeper research by the layman into the life of the greatest formalist of this century, perhaps among the handful in the history of mathematics that deserve Gauss' title of *clarissimus*.

<sup>1</sup> "Of the millions, how few get any education at all, how many live on the verge of starvation; of even those who get some education many have nothing to look forward to but a clerkship in some office on a pay that is usually far less than the unemployment dole in England. If life opened its gates to them and offered them food and healthy conditions of living and education and opportunities of growth, how many among these millions would be eminent scientists, educationists, technicians, industrialists, writers and artists, helping to build a new India and new world!" (from *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru).

<sup>2</sup> The highest accolade Hardy would give to a mathematician was in placing him in the Hobbs class, after the great English batsman Jack Hobbs.

Rishi Srinivasa Iyengar is a student of Mathematics.

## Towards a Professional Approach

Preeti Gill

CHILDREN'S FICTION IN INDIA: TRENDS AND MOTIFS

By Prema Srinivasan

TR Publications, 1998, pp.205, Rs.200.00

Children's literature is part of the larger panorama of world literature and it needs to be analyzed and promoted in much the same way. The range and diversity is immense and in India there has been a great deal of activity in this field. Over the years one has seen a number of books, authors and publishing houses do yeoman service to the cause of children's literature.

All of us grew up with favourite writers and authors, with favourite books, books that we still enjoy. These are not necessarily classics yet we still go back to them and recommend them to our own children. An enthralling tale told well moulds the imaginative and intellectual skills of the young reader more than toys and games.

The author is a well known name to readers of the *Hindu* and has written numerous articles on this special section of literature. As she writes in her Preface, this book contains a discussion of the important writers, the outstanding fiction produced and the publishing scene in the area of children's fiction written in English. There is a dearth of critical reference material on this subject as it is still not perceived as a separate area of study for a graduate or postgraduate course and the author too feels this lack.

Prema Srinivasan begins by discussing significant trends in children's literature both in India and abroad and feels that the general trend for writers is to deal with contemporary themes like environment preservation, scientific speculation and social concerns. This is true in India as well as more and more of our writers look to writers from the West, whether it is James Herriot and Gerald Durrell, or A.A. Milne for their animal/wildlife stories, or more contemporary writers like Libby Hathorne and Roald Dahl. The ever-eroding geographical boundaries is leading to a certain globalization in the kind of books that children are enjoying across

the world—there is a desire to share each other's experiences and a lot of them are common concerns to young people across nations.

Children today are no longer reading the classics recommended by their parents and their tastes have changed over a period of time. To chart this change the researcher has given a set of questions to be answered by child readers and she draws some very significant conclusions from her findings. These findings are extensively discussed at the end of the volume. Childhood as a period of pristine innocence has shrunk and children are venturing into hitherto forbidden thresholds much earlier. Writers of children's fiction should be able to perceive and use the prevailing situation to provide them with authentic and realistic portrayals of the problems confronting the young today.

Children are unrelenting and fierce critics as they are spontaneous in their praise. They cannot be fobbed off with clones of foreign authors and the usual masala mix of adventure stories, school stories, moral hectoring and traditional mythological tales as we have been dishing out to them in India. They are demanding more and we must recognize that they are dissatisfied with the stuff that is trundled out in the name of "children's literature". Why is it that so few children turn to Indian authors? We have outstanding writers like Ruskin Bond, R.K. Narayan and others who write for all of us, including the children in us. But how many of the children we know read them? One very important reason is that Indian writers of children's books focus on the tiny tot brigade, they do not address the older child, the young adult. Dr. Srinivasan feels that few of them talk of issues that concern the growing child confronted by doubts, hesitations and confusion. Often sophisticated beyond her/his years but without the emotional or intellectual balance to handle this sophistication, groups of readers are looking for answers, they are looking to identify.

Prema Srinivasan writes that teens seek their own routes towards adult fiction; Asimov, Buchanan, Jeffery Archer, Danielle Steele are popular with young readers. Indian teens also read much the same books and feel a lack of indigenously produced books that deal with sensitive subjects like premarital romance, drug abuse, gang warfare, rebelling against adult authority etc. "We want to read about the boy or girl next door. We do not want to read stories about good children who get sweets if they study well, but stories about us, about the fears and anxieties that we suffer from". This is an extract from a letter by a young reader.

We have had some excellent tales told by expert craftsmen, superb word-smiths like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai but these are few and far between.

Writing for children has been considered child's play but this is a misconception and it is such insensitivity that has resulted in the present dearth of good literature for children in this country—a failing that is decried at every seminar or conference organized around this subject including the recent IBBY Conference held in New Delhi last month. We need to do some serious soul searching.

It is essential to fill the colour of fantasy into the realism of today, of upgrading, as it were, folk literature and tales, to make them compulsive, enjoyable reading. In India we have a long tradition of oral tales, story telling was a much loved activity in all our shared remembrances of childhood. Written stories for children are a much more recent phenomenon, and the awareness to address the child reader as a separate target group is a concept borrowed from the West and came about only after Independence. It was only after the British came to India that books for children began to be regarded as an important part of literature.

The book gives a very useful historical reconstruct of early children's fiction in India as well as the premier institutions involved in the activity of commissioning books for children as well as promoting them like the National Book Trust, the National Council of Educational Research and Training, the Children's Book Trust etc. Describing the scene after the seventies Dr Srinivasan talks of other significant contributors to the field of children's literature both in terms of publishers and authors and here she reviews works by Ruskin Bond, Margaret Bhatt, Shashi Deshpande and others. Among the publishers Thompson Junior Library, Sterling, IBH, Ratnasagar were the first to give space to this fledgling genre followed by Rupa and Harper Collins, Penguin Books India, Orient Longman, and most recent entrant in India, the publishing giant Scholastic.

An important thing that emerges here is the observation that "children need at least two kinds of literature. They need books that portray people living the kind of life they lead themselves and they need to be taken into other worlds as different from their world as possible in order to stretch their imaginations or rather to keep their imaginations supple." And the "most significant formulaic artists are those who effectively resolve these problems in a way that balances the claims of escapism and the fulfillment of unconventional experience with the

artistic interests of revitalized stereotypes, some degree of originality, and as much plausibility as the boundaries of the formula will permit".

Dealing with narrative patterns in two chapters Dr. Srinivasan focuses on themes and trends in much of the literature available to kids and she looks at books she considers as pathbreaking or influential in some way. Much of what she sees in India has been modelled on the West. The adventure category has been voted the most popular sub genre with the 10–15 age group and among the many books she takes up here what stands out as an exceptional piece of writing is *The Kaziranga Trail* by Arup Dutta which she says ushered in a new type of adventure tale, Indian in tone texture.

The scene in the nineties is more firmly established and the readership too has grown somewhat with aggressive marketing by publishers. And so we now have a host of new writers, Monisha Mukundan, Sigrun Srivastva, Bulbul Sharma, Indi Rana, Subhadra Sengupta among others. Two seemingly contradictory impulses are found in children's writing in India: the obsession with myth and a rich tradition of epics and also side by side with this a desire to experiment with form and content. Science fiction, historical fiction, biographies, realistic tales, school stories, animal stories which operate on many levels, picture books and comic strips are all different genres and the author devotes critical space to all.

The last chapter of the book explores possibilities for the future of the genre. Indian writers she feels on the whole prefer to take a non controversial stand on most issues but the modern trend of emphasizing self fulfillment as against old world values is more or less accepted now. Progressive views on race, gender, social class and personal psychology are preferred to traditional concepts. And a concern for wildlife and environment, form themes of a large body of contemporary writing for children today.

Smaller sub sections deal with book promotion programmes, the role of the adult intermediary, the threat from visual media, the role of the teacher and also how to write for children. She concludes by saying that "this book has been conceived and written to improve the understanding of the reading needs of children in India, in the context of the diversity and quality that have emerged in children's writing today." We are all aware of the tremendous potential of children's literature and surely a serious study like this one augers well for the future of the book in this country.

Preeti Gill, formerly with The Book Review, is a freelance critic.

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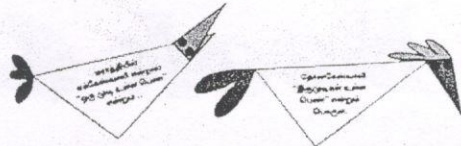
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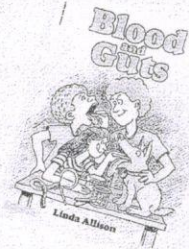
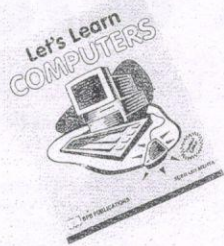
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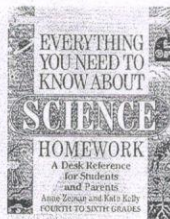
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## No Requiem For Children's Writing, Please!

Shefali Ray



"Text book, yes. Adaptations, maybe. But fiction? Original writing! Sorry, no." That is the classic response that accosts a creative children's writer on the lookout for a publisher. For years, the text book has enjoyed the maximum visibility in India. By India, we, of course, do not mean only the metropolitan cities where children's literature, written and published abroad, is accessible in abundance and variety. It (the text book) continues to edge out Indian fiction for the young for multiple reasons.

Such a situation has come to pass that good publishing houses like Ratna Sagar and Puffins India have almost downed the shutters of their 'children's fiction counters'. Many publishing houses have shifted to the more economically viable project of text book publishing—one which promises a large clientele, provided the right kind of effort and contacts are forthcoming. Thus year after year newer and newer sets of text books keep arriving in the market, of varying quality and reliability.

There are still a few publishers like Vikas, Madhuban who are persisting with children's fiction, though they may candidly call it a bad bargain.

So the publisher says, 'children's story books by Indian authors do not sell'. Moreover, the bookseller would not stock them and even if he does so, would certainly not give them prime location on his bookshelves. Thus this leaves the creative children's writer with two options. One is to join the team of writers of a text book series and get lost in adaptations, exercises and activities and try to make the best of a job which in truth is a highly technical one, to be dealt with by educationists and experts. The other is to forget writing altogether.

Talking to booksellers revealed that parents still prefer the well-known foreign publications which to them are predictable in content and quality. These the bookseller displays aggressively for he must remain in business.

Another plea that is offered in justification for refusing to publish or stock Indian writers is that children do not read any more. Paro Anand, Editor, National Centre for Children's Litera-

ture, rightly comments that television has been much maligned as the 'big bad wolf' devouring children's leisure and interests. Interviews with educated parents, however revealed that children still read but they read what their parents and teachers suggest. Parents suggest time-tested literature only because it is familiar to them. The teacher often ends up suggesting books she herself grew up with, for she is unaware of the new breed of children's writers who have appeared on the literary scene.

Thus, as Ms. Anand feels, access and knowledge are of prime importance in this game of children's writing. Here the publisher and the school can play a pivotal role in enhancing visibility. It would be worth mentioning the Book Reading and Story Telling projects of the National Book Trust which have successfully taken books to the children especially to areas where the bookshop is a rarity. The strategy then is to initially circumvent the bookseller and talk directly to the parent clientele and the target group, the children. And, what better place to do it than the school where there is a captive audience. And, what better way to make the book visible, than to weave it into the school curriculum in a hundred and one interesting ways.

The first responsibility in ensuring visibility of the book lies with the author who should keep in mind current interests of children and use a language that 'speaks with the child, and not one which 'talks to her.' Ritu Singh, a children's writer and reviewer feels that the language of much of children's writing is still very formal and at times overpoweringly didactic. Values are significant but should they be crystallized and placed as an appendage of the story? Could they not be woven in the 'warp and weft' of the narration instead of making them distinguishable as 'knots in a piece of faulty weaving'? As many teachers and children feel, humour has yet to find a significant place in children's writing in our country. Last but not the least, could the Indian writer emerge out of the chrysalis that holds him/her captive as a mere clone of his/her more established western counterpart? Life is

multifarious, intensely exciting and challenging. Could we find such episodes from it that the Indian child can relate to, empathize with?

Next comes the publisher who could complement the good work done by an author through good art-work, sometimes conventional, sometimes stylized, good paper, good binding and an attractive packaging that propels both the child and the parent towards a book? Even the best of gems remains obscure if not shown the light of day. Book-reading sessions, story-telling sessions, 'meet the author' sessions, quizzes with prizes, campaigning and advertising would go a long way in popularizing a new book. Could we have the same kind of build up as we have for a promising book for adults? Can we offer it to the child and let her make her own decision? Probably such an effort around April or May just before the onset of vacations, in the opinion of Mr. Rupendra Kashyap, Som Sudha Prakashan, would increase awareness and visibility. This way, both children and parents, would know what new books are available for the young reader.

One can never discount the role of newspapers and magazines in popularizing children's books, through more dedicated space—whether for reviews, interviews, discussions or comments. 'Ananda Mela' a literary supplement of *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* is doing yeoman service in bringing new books to children through its Puja Special wherein children can get ten books for the price of three. Later these books are published individually too. If anywhere, children's literature is doing well, it is in Bengal.

The school librarian has a significant part to play in bringing new books to the children. Not only rounds of book fairs and exhibitions and, purchasing the new and the ones which promise to be interesting but also inviting publishers to the school would help. Reading lists could be prepared and some interesting activities worked around these books.

Book Fairs and Book Melas for children should be organized by publishers in collaboration with schools where activities could be clubbed along with the pleasure of browsing and book buying. The effort should be to make the much neglected children's writer visible.

Let us not sing a requiem for Indian writing for children. Let us attempt to turn it into an ode in celebration of a genre meant for the young alone—one they can relate to—one they may cherish in times to come.

*Shefali Ray is an educationist and children's writer based in New Delhi.*

## Peace Through Children's Books

Nita Berry

THERE'S ANOTHER WAY: STORIES OF PEACE, LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Edited by Deepa Agarwal. Illustrated by Tapas Guha

Madhuban Educational Books, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., pp. 103, 1998, Rs.35.00

It has permeated our lives everywhere—at home, in school, the street and even through the media. It glares down at us from road-side hoardings. It reveals its savage face over the small screen and the large. It freezes one's blood even through innocuous computer games. No—violence cannot be wished away for it has come to stay as a stark reality in our lives at every age. As a way of life and thought. Yet, is there no other way out of difficult situations or conflict?

That's just what *There's Another Way*, a collection of ten stories brought out by Madhuban Educational Books is all about. Written by AWIC members, these entertaining stories revolve around varying situations where problems in young lives could be resolved through either violent means, or amicably through 'peace, love and friendship'. When you opt for the latter, "the glow of forgiveness, sharing friendship... is definitely a much more pleasant and comfortable feeling than that of wanting to seek revenge" ("Red Says Stop").

What do you do when the bottom seems to fall out of your world? Your parents are suddenly not your own. You are an unwelcome stranger in your own house, an intruder—unloved, unwanted and rootless. How hateful everything appears. In "We Love You, Anjali", young Anjali is horrified to discover that she is adopted. "My mind



froze for a moment—my real parents didn't want me. They had abandoned me. I started trembling with anger, hatred and bitterness." The discovery of a tiny abandoned baby puts things into perspective and brings about a change of heart, and happiness. Nilima Jha's sensitive story is told with deep sympathy and understanding of the plight of the mute and the insecure.

When social and religious prejudice permeate into children's lives and make their eyes spit fire when in reality "we are all children of one God", the end can be sad and meaningless. In "The Right Remedy" two bright and brave children set out to counter adult prejudices and murderous hatred in their own innovative way. It saves the day and the villages. This absorbing story by R.K. Murthi is enlivened by his humorous, pithy style.

Hari and Ravi in "Red Says Stop" sell newspapers at traffic light crossings. They take their cue from Hindi films to resolve their rivalries through heroic fights. After all, didn't their favourite hero from the latest blockbuster always "rub his enemy's face in the mud... and destroy him forever!" Fortunately, childhood feelings of friendship and forgiveness reassert themselves to make the end a happy one. In this action filled story, Nilima takes a dig at celluloid heroes who as role models have fostered much mindless violence in mundane lives.

"Bravo Deepak" centres around a very topical problem—campus violence much of which is supported by political parties. As Warden of Peace Deepak falls victim to gang violence and is brutally attacked. Should he quit as Warden of Peace to ensure his further safety, or work without disclosing names of the gang so that they continue their activities thinking he is afraid? His brother blinks back his tears. "We both knew the answer". This engrossing story by Thangamani, told through lively dialogue, depicts the seriousness of violence which has become the bane of campus life in our country.

Domestic strife has always been a reality in the lives of many hapless children, but was kept closely under wraps. It was never discussed openly in our conservative society, least of all in stories for the young. Today in the face of crumbling values, where broken marriages and single parent families are on the increase, many taboos in writing have been broken. Adults are no longer viewed as faultless role models, but may be even a source of embarrassment and resentment, as "A Walk in the Rain" by Deepa Agarwal shows. Nitin's pain finds a vent when he confides in Reshma Aunty during a walk through the puddles. A new canine

friend lifts his spirits and suddenly his perspective on life changes, as new possibilities open up. This sensitive issue is brought out effectively through Deepa Agarwal's descriptive narrative.

A revolt in the jungle against Man? In "The War for Water", a modern fable by Dilip Salwi, the animals are perturbed that there is only one source of drinking water left in the jungle, which means sure death. They have many grievances against humans who are "spreading like a cancer on the earth," and gear up for war. However, in the midst of the uproar emerges the voice of reason, the voice of peace. "There are always solutions if one desires peace! We've only to keep our eyes and ears open!" Supported by an ingenious idea from Cobra who suggests using the good offices of the termites known for their marvellous engineering skills in tapping underground water sources, peace prevails and war is averted. As with all Salwi's writing, there is much interesting information packed into this story.

Is it a woman's *kismet* to suffer unjustly at the hands of her husband? Domestic violence forms the theme again of Paro Anand's touching short story, "Babloo's Bhabi". "All hell broke loose. Suddenly the pitcher lay smashed on the ground with Bhabi lying among the pieces begging her husband for forgiveness. She clutched his feet as he rained blows on her and kicked her arms that stretched out pleadingly." Ultimately twelve-year old Babloo stands up to his brother to stop the ugly habit once and for all, and becomes a man.

How do you combat a bunch of pea shooting bullies who are hefty and seem afraid of nobody? Thirteen-year old Ravi is small for his age but surprisingly good at everything, thus inviting the envy of older, bigger bullies who tease him mercilessly. Thangam Krishnan's "Big is Not For Bullying" finds a happy solution to Ravi's predicament.

The heartbreak of domestic violence is the theme of "Dreams of Tomorrow" too. Manisha's parents constant quarrelling and banging "disturbed her bringing about a strange kind of despair." Always "reserved and strangely tongue tied, never smiling, a queer loner," she envies her classmates for their happy homes. The idea of living with Dada and Dadi in their tranquil little cottage gains ground. Ultimately she musters up courage to tell her parents that she wants to live life on her own terms. This becomes the turning point of her unhappy existence. Swapna Dutta writes with characteristic vigour and feeling in this moving story with vivid scenes.

There's violence of a different kind

altogether in "Every Morning You Greet Me". "Not just people shooting at one another, murders, mob violence, neighbours and friends and family members coming to blows. But... trees being felled, grass being torn off, flowers, foliage, insects and animals massacred Chimneys puffing out smoke, pipes spilling out waste, children developing asthma and rashes, and wilting away like flowers themselves." Rohit is deeply concerned about man's exploitation of nature. He dislikes people like Mrs. Bose, Aunt Loveleen or even Pommy who hurt and maim plants. Only when Mrs. Bose lies hurt and helpless does she realize "what pain I have been inflicting throughout my life (on plants), heedlessly hurting them when they couldn't even cry for help or run away." Dipavali Debroy's sensitive story views nature as a living being, whom man has been exploiting shamelessly. This beautiful story stresses too the importance of environmental conservation.

This varied set of outstanding stories told by well known authors all carry an important message, the importance of peace, friendship and love. A little more humour in the stories would have been welcome for their issues are all uniformly serious. But then perhaps violence is no laughing matter!

The editor has been careful to preserve individual writing styles which adds to the spice of the collection. Good editing is enhanced by an attractive layout and typeface, although one feels the thick black line at the base of each page is unnecessary. A few printing errors could have been avoided. The illustrations leave much to be desired although the illustrator is a well known one. The figures, though generally expressive, are often gross and unappealing and do not usually match the sensitivity of the issues discussed. However, at Rs. 35 this compact book is a bargain.

The release of this book in the year of the New Delhi IBBY Congress in September, the theme of which is *Peace Through Children's Books* is indeed apt. Ironically 1998 is also the year of the Pokhran nuclear tests. Whether these are seen as deterrents to violence or not, it is vital for our young that sanity and reason have the last word. *There's Another Way!* shows just how.

Nita Berry is a freelance journalist and author of children's books. Her book *The Story of time* won the *Shankar Gold Medal* in 1995.



## Introduction to Hindu Culture

Pratibha Nath

THE HINDU CULTURE: A CLEAR AND CONCISE SUMMARY FOR YOUNGSTERS

By Mrinal Bali

Youngster Publications, Pune, 1997, pp. 77, price not mentioned

Writing a book on Hindu culture is a daunting task. So, for that matter, is reviewing a book on Hindu culture. The issue becomes all the more sensitive if the text is addressed to youngsters. Given the state of their minds, what would click with the youngsters today?

What caught my imagination was the blurb. 'Look around you', says the author. 'Observe nature. That's what our sages of yore did. That's what you do, and the basics of the Hindu culture will emerge simple and clear as fresh water.' The approach is commendable and the book, in parts at least, very practical and down-to-earth and therefore, very instructive.

But to begin at the beginning. The book starts by emphasizing the strengths of Hindu culture and the fact that it has survived, very creditably, a challenge from at least three other powerful religions, namely Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Using 'culture' almost as a synonym for religion, the writer asks, 'What is it in the Hindu culture that stands up rock solid to every challenge that comes its way?'

A pertinent question. As to the answer, one is invited to read and find out.

The table of the principal Hindu texts from which the book is said to derive is welcome. It enables the reader to see at a glance where, for instance, the Upanishads stand in relation to the Vedas and the Samhitas. From being simply names, they become part of a vast scheme of texts and religious tradition.

There is logic in what follows. A quote from the Rig Veda Samhita says:

The enlightened sages first observe, then make a deep study of the secrets of God's creation. Then they repeatedly form their own versions, filled with new vigour and suited to the times' (p. 15).

Seeing that everything around them was changing ceaselessly, our sages realized that whatever their senses per-



ceived was only what was apparent, not real. What, then, was real, constant, changeless? These sages were drawn by a quest for immortality, freedom from change, birth and death. Where did the quest lead them? How did they arrive at the concept of the real self? And having arrived at that concept, what means did they suggest for reaching the real self?

Here the book makes a sweeping statement: 'All matter, said the sages, is striving to go from ceaseless change to a state of no change—that is, to Brahman. By 'all matter' the sages meant literally all matter. Even rocks, said the sages, seek Brahman.' It goes further to cite the findings of Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking in support of this view (p. 23).

And then, we are inevitably back to the issue that plagues all thinking men and women.

'If a man fails to attain Brahman before he casts off his body, he must again put on a body in the world of created things (*Katha Upanishad*).

If that be the case, you must make a conscious effort 'to become immortal in Brahman. Achieve Brahman.'

The book then goes on to discuss ways of attaining Brahman (p.29). 'It is with your mind that you achieve Brahman. To reach your goal, you must first work on your body and mind. In other words, practise 'yoga'. Swami Prabhavananda, a noted sage, compared Yoga to seeing the bottom of a lake.

'If the surface of a lake is lashed into waves, or if the water is muddy, the bottom cannot be seen. The lake represents the mind, and the bottom of the lake, the Atman (Brahman).'

The various steps suggested by Yoga for attaining Brahman are dealt with in some detail. There is also a section devoted to 'the symbol of all possible sounds. . . Om Om is Brahman. Om is all. He who meditates on Om attains to Brahman' (*Taittiriya Upanishad*).

Hence a word about 'dhyana' meaning concentration. The chapter 'How to achieve Brahman' closes with the final step of Yoga, that is 'samadhi' or prolonged 'dhyana'.

"Samadhi is when the mind remains in complete concentration, always de-

*'Look around you', says the author. 'Observe nature. That's what our sages of yore did. That's what you do, and the basics of the Hindu culture will emerge simple and clear as fresh water.' The approach is commendable and in parts very practical and down-to-earth. . .*



tached from the senses, always steady, never changing. The yogi in samadhi has found the Atman, has found Brahman."

Section 4, Questions & Answers, seeks to resolve doubts pertaining to issues like the need for a 'guru', the pursuit of wealth, the caste system and vegetarianism. The Gayatri Mantra is given along with its interpretation, a detail sometimes missed out in books of this nature.

One does, however, wish that the verses relating to the status of women in Hindu culture had been less negative than 'One should not despise any woman. That is the rule' —*Chandogya Upanishad*. The author tries to prove that Hindu culture is attributed to the goddess Lakshmi and knowledge to the goddess Saraswati. But another verse, quoted from the *Bṛhad Upanishad* is highly derogatory to women (p.66).

According to this book, a happy, healthy balance should be struck between the material world and a life of renunciation till it is time for a person to devote himself entirely to spiritual pursuits.

'When will it be time for you to make a conscious effort for Brahman? When you too hear Om everywhere and see Brahman everywhere. Until you do, go play soccer. Develop a healthy body... Observe. . . Practise yoga. . ." (p. 58).

Sound advice, here as elsewhere in the book. All the same, the basics of Hindu culture do not always emerge simple and clear as fresh water. There are too many, sometimes heavy quotes to block the way. The text could have been lighter, interspersed with more explanations in the writer's own words. Here and there a story from the ancient texts would have been welcome. As it is, the book is totally focussed and therefore, too intense, at least for youngsters. It may be more in tune as an initial/refresher course for older people.

One last detail—Arjuna was the son of Pritha (Kunti), and not of Partha. Partha was his own name (p.46).

*Pratibha Nath is a freelance journalist who contributes articles to newspapers and magazines. A one-time teacher of English, she has written many books for children.*

## Environmental Concerns

Dipavali Debroy

TYLTYL'S ADVENTURE

By Swapna Datta. Illustrations by Vicky Arya

1997, pp. 16, Rs. 6.00

PATTERNS FROM NATURE

By Judhajit Sengupta

1997, pp. 12, Rs. 6.50

LIZARDS

By Indraneil Das and Romulus Whitaker. Drawing, transparencies, photography by the authors

1997, pp. 32, Rs. 6.50

MAMA MOO ON A SWING

By Juja and Tomas Wieslander. Illustrations by Sven Nordqvist

1997, pp. 24, Rs. 25.00

THE KING WHO PLAYED MARBLES

By H.C. Madan. Illustrations by Saibal Chatterjee

1996, pp. 30, Rs. 10.00

A PARCEL FOR THE POSTMASTER

By Dronvir Kohli. Translated by Shama Chowdhury. Illustrations by Jagdish Joshi

1996, pp. 52, Rs. 14.50

All Nehru Bal Pustakalaya books, published by the National Book Trust, New Delhi.

In this Age of Information Technology, the child has information flung at him right from the start. Of late, some of it has consciously been about the environment. And that is a most welcome development in this age of nuclear explosions. Against this background, also welcome are the four titles, *Tyltyl's Adventure*, *Patterns from Nature*, *Lizards* and *Mama Moo on A Swing*.

*Patterns from Nature* is a most innovative book, a cross between a 'picture book' and a 'work book'. Each page has a colourful background of forest and foliage, with an empty, white space in the middle, in the shape of a bird or animal. On the inner back cover, there are twelve rectangles of colourful patterns, marked with the names of the birds or animals to which they belong. The child is asked to choose the right pattern for each of the empty spaces, paint it in, and "see the difference it makes". A delightful way to teach the

child that "there are patterns all around you—in plants, animals and things made by human beings. Patterns are not only beautiful, they are also useful. They might hide an animal from its enemies as the zebra's stripes do.. They might even send out a signal as a peacock's display does." Information when presented to me child must itself be camouflaged as entertainment, and this, the book does acknowledge, attempt and achieve. One only wishes that there had been at least one extra page for each of the birds and animals. Surely there are children who would like to see what would happen if the 'right' pattern was not chosen. How would a giraffe look coloured like the ladybird? What signals would a peacock send out, when striped like the zebra or spotted like the cheetah?

*Tyltyl's Adventure* is a most informative piece on sea-turtles, but look at the way this information is presented.



Topsy is a sea-turtle who lived in the sea, but when it was time for her to lay her eggs, she swam back to the sandy shore and laid her eggs there. The book begins with Tytyl, one of Topsy's babies, hatching and coming out of the sand. It describes how Tytyl, along with her brothers and sisters, tries to reach the sea—which they instinctively feel to be their home. The child is informed about the provisions Nature makes for sea-turtles—such as worms inside sand heaps and water in puddles. Also the dangers she exposes them to—such as boys who dig up turtle-eggs, sea-gulls and sharks who feed upon baby turtles. But the information comes couched in simple yet graphic language and the most wonderful of illustrations on a background that is the colour of the sand. Vicky Arya has not merely illustrated this book; he has co-created it. The book contains more than information. As the baby turtles find they have to battle continuously for their survival, they are worried. Tytyl looked around him anxiously. He didn't want any accidents. "Life seems to be jolly hard," said one of his brothers. "It seems to me that we are always hiding from killers of one kind or another!" "Life is an adventure, silly!" said Tytyl. "We'll all get used to it in time. And enjoy it too. See if we don't."

The book *Mama Moo on a Swing* is really an Indian edition of a book—

*Mamma Mu Gungar*—originally published by *Natur Och Ockh Kultur*, Stockholm, in Swedish. However, it is a pity the translator's name is not stated. Though not as such informative, this book also deals with the world of birds and animals. The full-page illustrations are lively and the story may captivate the Indian child for the very reason that the Indian Go-Mata is, conceptually and really, so different from Mama Moo. And does the book also contain a message for the girl-child the world over? To quote Mama Moo, "Ho hum, ho hum, just because I am a cow doesn't mean I have to stand around chewing my cud and staring at nothing all the time?"

*Lizards* concentrates on providing information, and though it has many sketches and photographs, does not provide the information in an attractive fashion. Take, for example, the opening lines: "Lizards are the commonest of all living reptiles, and many different kinds live around us in India. Most species are small. They are tree or ground-dwelling, with body temperatures that change according to the surroundings and none of them look after their young" (p. 3). A story like *Tytyl's Adventure*, of course, in language and style suitable for older children, would have captured the interest better.

The other two books do not carry information, but messages.

*The King Who Played Marbles* begins like the usual tale of kings and queens. Even when we are told that the young, orphaned prince, instead of learning statecraft, is playing marbles and building up the biggest ever collection of marbles, we are not too surprised. Princes of India in similar circumstances have often been found to be busy flying kites and sporting with pigeons. But we sit up when we find that the enemy camp also gets drawn into the game of marbles and clean forgets all about their aggressive intentions. Games and sports among countries are perhaps a promising way to world peace. They bring out the child in each one of us, and can help clear the environment of much pollution. The language is not equally easy-flowing everywhere, but the colourful illustrations make up for it, and the message is clear.

*A Parcel For The Postmaster* is set not in olden times, but goes back only a few years from now. In a valley in Himachal Pradesh, the postmaster is completely baffled to find a stone parcelled to him by a schoolboy from Delhi. Through the postman, the whole village comes to know and wonder. In the end, the boy from Delhi explains in a letter that he had picked up the stone from the valley and taken it to Delhi. There, however, he had the uncanny feeling that the stone to the postmaster, asking him to put it back where it belonged.

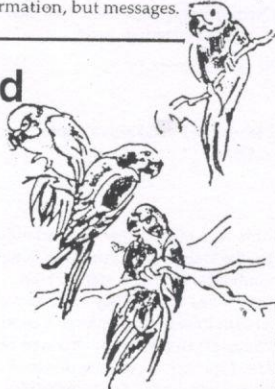
Much could have been made of the supernatural element here. But instead, the book, aided by its delightful sketches, builds up the atmosphere of a remote village in the mountains, its post-office, its people and its natural beauty. The postmaster, who hailed from elsewhere, had stayed on at the village because he had fallen in love with it. He had blended with its environment. That is why he is the principal character of the book, the one to place the stone back, and convey the message that the environment must not be disturbed by man.

These NBT books cater to various age groups. While *Tytyl's Adventure*, *Patterns from Nature*, and *Mama Moo on a Swing* are for quite small children, the other three are for older children. But all of them are books that teach children to care for the environment in all its aspects. Patterns in nature are being destroyed, the habitat of sea-turtles, lizards, cows as well as men, are getting endangered, river valleys are having their ecological balances disturbed. And the war game is going on. In such a world, books like the six above have a role to play. Do gift them to children you know, and before that, look into them yourself.

*Dipavali Debroy* is a freelance writer and contributes regularly to children's magazines.

## Sharing Ideas and Experiences

Deeya Nayar, Radhika Menon and Sandhya Rao



Unknown words don't stop the child. But a boring story will." So said Isaac Bashevis Singer, and hit spot-on the epicenter of the debate on children's literature. What sort of books should be written for children? Are they reading enough? and the right books? Are the books themselves 'alright' (read 'politically correct')? How much should they cost? So much, just so much, has been analyzed and discussed on the subject. So obsessive have these questions become that quite often the wood is missed for the trees.

As publishers, these issues can't be ignored. As small-time publishers with a commitment to produce "quality

books for children", they are indeed relevant. What is important however is to keep a balance.

Attitudes are of course born of personal experiences. We belong to a generation fed for a while—at a most impressionable phase—on an almost exclusive diet of Enid Blyton, what else? More familiar with Kirrin Island, English boarding school life, birch trees and outdoor heather beds. Life around us probably didn't make for good stories and never really mattered—or so it would seem. Good books happened elsewhere, usually in England. It took a good bit of adult hindsight (and an actual taste of things) to figure out otherwise.

erwise.

Which obviously inclined us to root for samosas and gulab jamuns when we got the chance. Translated into publishing language this means culturally relevant books, books within an Indian idiom. So that our children at least can grow up with a wholesome sense of identity with things Indian. Not in any overt I-Indian, my-India kind of way, but naturally. To be aware of their surroundings, their people, their country as it is today, not only their heritage. For to grow up strong in one's own culture surely gives one the confidence to accept others open-mindedly, neither too aggressive nor defensive. Enid Blyton is a wonderful writer, and books from other countries are important. They open out whole new worlds for us. But they have to co-exist with our own books. Supplement them, not override them like in the past.

Ours has in a sense been a generation reacting. An understandable post-colonial phenomenon and one which we seem to share with other colonized countries, such as those in Africa. A good thing too, for it has spawned a vast amount of ethnic literature for adults and children. "People need to find themselves in the books that

they read," says Brigid Smith in *The Prose and the Passion: Children and Their Reading*. Regional language books have had this advantage, which is why our parents who grew up stronger in the vernacular than most of us have not faced this problem.

What has changed now is that English too has become as Indian a language as any other. And writing in English doesn't anymore mean having Jill and Sam as characters in an English countryside. Nor does it mean translating regional stories in correct, simple English—with a bland pan-Indian flavour that captures nothing of the local flavour which gives it its life. For there is no 'one type' of Indian, no definition. There are indeed many Indians, and Indians all, that make up India.

But all this is post analysis of what started off as pure gut-feeling at Tulika. One of the first experiments was *Ekki Dokki*—one of those timeless grandma's tales in Marathi, retold most unselfconsciously in English. No heavy claims in mind. Characters were wackily picturized as combinations of triangles. Marathi words were used where necessary, for they seemed natural. And no stuffy glossaries to put

children off, or explanatory notes at the bottom of the page. We created the Wordbird, which streaked across the page explaining unfamiliar words or ideas. So we could now retain regional words as we chose, and children could build up an interesting new vocabulary in a most imaginative way. There is a whole new generation who speak 'Indian', with English as the springboard, dipping into a rich melting-pot of languages all the time... and everyone understands.

Like Singer said, strange words don't matter. The story did. Parents told us how their children wouldn't sleep without listening to Ekkesvali and Dhonkesvali's adventure, and that was all the proof we needed. Our nose had led us on the right track! With so Indian an ambience—the story, the colours, the pictures—the appreciation from foreign publishers as well was quite encouraging. A good book obviously crosses all boundaries. But while they felt the illustrations were wonderful, they weren't Indian enough, they said... meaning, not quite like our miniature paintings, with long-skirted long-haired damsels in veils? Another strange objection, that too from an organization specializing in multiculturalism, was the baldness of the two sisters. For Ekki (as per the story) had just one hair, Dokki had one more. Their contention that it might be upsetting for children who have had chemotherapy for cancer, and therefore insensitive, quite knocked us over! Our explanations—that the story was such, that Indian children didn't react so, and that shaving the head was quite common in India—left them unconvinced. And enlightened us that even how we react to shaved or bald heads is so cultural!

Yes, one has to be sensitive to hurting references to 'bald', 'fat' and 'ugly', especially when they apply to already unlikable characters. That is our responsibility, particularly as children's publishers. Yet political correctness is clearly an issue that has to be balanced, culturally and in a lot of other ways. We have to have our own guidelines; there can be no rigid rules. Hazel Rochman comments in her book *Against Borders*, on what she calls the 'PC debate':

"If there's one thing I've learnt in this whole multi-cultural debate, it's not to trust absolutes. I say something and then immediately qualify it with 'And yet...'. And it's usually because I find a book that upsets all my neat categories. That's what good books do: they unsettle us, make us ask questions about what we thought as certain. They don't just reaffirm everything we already know."



Succinctly put, and probably rings uncomfortable bells for most publishers. We, at least, often tie ourselves in knots trying to sort out the most seemingly innocuous issues. Particularly, perhaps, with illustrations. Princess Surya, the Sun's daughter in the folktale *Eyes on the Peacock's Tail* (Under the Banyan series) a sweet, coy thing, waits garland in hand, swayamvara-style, to marry her proud peacock—and has us all up in arms! We want a 'normal' girl for princess, with some of her father's fire in her. All princesses surely are not, cannot, and should not be shown to be shrinking violets. Some stereotypes have to be challenged, we were certain of that. And the artist had to rework her into the mind-of-her-own thing she is now.

Then there were the 'fairies' in *Magic Vessels* (a Tamilnadu folktale, also from Under the Banyan). They were first converted into 'tree-spirits' (after a lot of brainstorming for the right word) for fairies had too many connotations of fair and delicate little waifs with wings—too female, also too foreign. We felt they should be darker for one thing, and unisex. That was the easy bit! What followed was heated discussions on how they should be dressed, or undressed. To dress them would give them a sex—we couldn't very well have them in unisex shorts and t-shirts. There were shocked responses at our suggestion that the 'more female' of the spirits should be as bare-bodied as the others! But we stuck to our instinct, and a compromise arrived at which worked out fine, going by the feedback we've had. It can be done!

Illustrations are so important in children's books. The problem is that good pictures cost money. Picture books, meant to facilitate reading, especially lose their point if not reproduced attractively. Good paper, printing, processes, low print-runs (as with most small publishers) all add to the cost of a book. Besides it would be unfair to undervalue the work of illustrators, writers and translators. Bad enough that quality publishers con-

stantly fight the market in prices, it is doubly disheartening when otherwise 'enlightened' people tell us to "keep the price between ten and fifteen rupees". How can quality books be sold cheap? Are handcrafted things not more expensive than mass-produced ones? It is quite unfortunate that even those in the comfortable-income group, who would buy ice-creams for their children at the drop of a hat, complain about the price of a book that would last them so much longer than those ice-creams... not to compare the value. Nor to undermine the pleasure of eating an ice-cream!

One certainly wishes that books could be made less expensive all round. That children's books apart, even *A Suitable Boy* or *God of Small Things* could be bought at two hundred rupees. But given all inputs that boils down to wishful thinking. Each book has a price which should not be undervalued. Where possible, we have indeed reduced prices. For instance, when *Sorry, Best Friend* was sponsored by *Frontline* magazine, Chennai, it reflected immediately in the cost of the book which dipped from Rs. 72 to Rs. 30—on hindsight a bit underpriced, for we now face problems with the re-print.

We have even been advised by the most well-meaning people to print our language books on cheaper paper. Why? Are children who choose to read in a regional language not entitled to the same quality? If we don't make our language books as attractive and well-produced as the English ones we will be defeating the very purpose of publishing in languages. The explanation that they might otherwise be inaccessible to a lot of people is only a limited side of the picture. Strangely, costs of imported books don't seem to bother most people—a black and white teacher's resource book is priced at Rs. 200 while a four-colour profusely illustrated Hindi book with the same specifications at Rs. 135 is considered exorbitant. Is it because they are the only ones deemed to be of value?

The mental block with language books continues with a lot of bookshops. "Don't give us vernacular books," they say quite openly. This, when we are trying to encourage children into reading more in languages, with books as attractive as those in English. These same shops are also happy to display foreign brand-name books in their special stands, but claim to have no space for ours. But luckily, the future is not completely grey. There has been a noticeable change for the positive in the last couple of years, and there are the sympathetic ones who are very supportive.

The tide seems to turning, too, with

the media. Where children's books were usually dismissed in two sentences for reviews—that is when they were reviewed at all, not dumped!—there is a growing consciousness of them as at least worth a little more detail, at least sometimes. Children's publishing in India is yet to come of age, and the bottom line is that we need the support we can get. But we are inching there, and on our own terms. What we still need is a strong marketing strategy overall, which catches the attention of and reaches books to the maximum number of people, within India and overseas.

With this in mind Tulika launched its very own website on internet (which, incidentally, did us proud by winning an award for design!), so our books were accessible anywhere in the world. It is particularly important for there to be a flow of books from east to west. Only then can stereotypes of the so-called oriental be perceived as only that—not the reality. *And Land Was Born*, for example, is an intriguing little-known tribal tale of creation from Central India, for which the illustrator painstakingly researched paintings of Bhilalas do on mud-walls of their homes. What emerged was a wonderful blend of her talent and imagination, rooted in tradition. Yet while the book was much praised by publishers abroad, it was considered "too culturally removed" for western children (in fact we have often been surprised at the resistance to such books in India as well). The pictures were wonderful, they said—read 'exotic', as they should be, coming from the land of elephants and snake-charmers—but the story too "foreign". As foreign to those children as gnomes, fairies and witches are to ours. But ours have absorbed these ideas and been the richer for it.

The truth is that these distinctions and debates are adult creations. Children are children the world over—curious, accepting, and very discerning in their own way. While we ponder and pontificate over the hows, whys and whats of reading, they read, making their own judgements. And as long as we ensure that they want to read, and enjoy what they read we believe we are on the right track.

Deeya Nayar, Sandhya Rao, Radhika Menon are editors at Tulika Publishers, Chennai.



## CBT for Children 1997-98

Meenakshi Bharat

The posy of six books offered by the Children's Book Trust, on the eve of the IBBY (International Board of Books for the Young) conference held in Delhi in October makes one sit up in the hope that there is some exceptional fare that is being laid out. The timing turns their appearance into an invitation for an earnest evaluation of the scenario of children's books being published in India today.

The two slim books of verse for little children in Hindi *Mooncche Tane Pahuncha Thane* (1997) and *Chandamama Ka Pajama* (1998) are indiscriminate collections with no apparent guiding, cohering editorial principle. The pedestrian quality of the verse is highlighted by the trite subjects which are treated in both: rail, sunlight (both in winters and summers), gardens, trees, flowers, birds, toys—as if these are the only topics around which verse for children can be written. Yet, despite hackneyed inclusions like 'Apna Ghar,' out of the two books *Chandamama Ka Pajama* manages to achieve some success. For instance, the oft-repeated Diwali and Holi themes for children are set aside for a charming change in a little poem on *Id*, 'Id Ka Chaand.' It is worth noting that even though the same illustrator, Ajanta Guhathakurta is associated with the two books,

*Chandamama* has drawn better work from her chiefly because the text has more possibilities. The best of the collection are the verses that have a 'story' element. Renu Chauhan's pen is able to successfully create some magic for the little ear. The title poem is a minor gem, bubbling with humour, and buoyed by the sense of wonder; packed with information, ultimately making an entertaining narrative. Similarly, this brilliant tie-up 'Chhoti Macchli' and 'Mendhak ki Baraat'.

*Dinika Visits Grandpa's Farm* (1997) is a slight book replicating the 'Old MacDonald had a farm' idea of taking the listener or reader on a conducted tour of a farm. The verse is forgettable; in fact, quite often, clumsy. The pastel illustrations by Jagdish Joshi are not memorable enough to either excite the little one, or to save the book. Poor designing and just passable illustrations for an otherwise well written book take some toll of Santhini Govindan's *A Present for Mrs. Kangaroo's Pouch* (1997). Nonetheless, the story that had been given a prize in the Picture Book Category in the Competition for Writers for Children, is engaging, packed with interesting information about how different animals mother their little ones and carry them around. In the same manner, *Christopher the Pilot* (1998) by Ravina Gandhi, a pleasing little story about a child's ambition to fly like his pilot father, is let down by unimaginative illustrations which lack finesse.

For the older child looking for thrills, Mitra Phukan's *The Biratpur Adventure* (1997) follows the path already chalked out by the established master of the genre, Arup Kumar Dutta, in placing them unmistakably in the Assam jungles. Aply set in *magh bihu* land, complete with *mekhala-sador*; interesting information about the native flora and fauna; and tracing migratory patterns of birds in marshes abuzz with mosquitoes and infested with leeches, the narrative has the necessary twists and turns of an adventure tale. This book, awarded the Second Prize in the General Fiction Category in the competition for Writers of Children's Books by the Children's Book Trust, harks back to superstitious beliefs about the lost souls of Biratpur and the historical background of the lost city to reinforce local colour.

The primary emphasis on the plot

results in a gloss over the serious issues that are only hinted in the narrative: the differences of class, the rising pertinence of the contemporary context of separatism, gender stereotyping. The final inclusion of Munu, the poor village boy into the forest official's family from Guwahati and a stray attempt to overturn gender stereotypes with the mention of the girls rowing better than the boys, warrant more than the passing attention give them. The attempts to individualize the four child protagonists by the attribution of idiosyncratic differences like love for food or books are minimal and therefore inadequate. The book achieves some measure of success in the evocation of mood by apt comparisons in keeping with the setting ('watching [the knife] hypnotically, much like a small snake looks at the large mongoose'). In this 'all's-well-that-ends-well' story, peopled by stereotypical good, kind-hearted, selfless policemen and evil, harsh, cruel villains, the suspense is quite competently maintained.

*From Atom to Nano-Tech* (1977) is a collection largely made from entries in the category Popular Science in the Competition for Writers of Children's Books organized by Children's Book Trust. In the context of boring staid science texts, the effort though commendable is not enough. Some chapters which begin dramatically and creatively like 'Earthquakes', and 'Autobiography of an Atom,' manage to make some impact. Highlighted by a series of interesting facts, the message of the chapters is communicated amply through the simple clear language. But the effect of the book is not even because some of the essays, still pushed by the textbook impulse, are too staidly and boringly phrased and constructed. Moreover, if names of essayists are given in the contents, they should be allowed the respect of appearing at the top of the essay. The illustrations, though apt, have nothing original to add to the subject.

In the final analysis, these books, though beautifully printed, well produced and quite accessibly priced, do not completely satisfy the concerned

and discerning reader because they are a rather average, mixed bag. The promise of stray, tardy sparks of talent is not fulfilled. The lack of that final glimmer makes the books a reminder that it is time to seriously take stock of the situation of children's literature today. The need of the hour is to recognize the child reader with respect by committedly producing literature where the writer, illustrator, and publisher all join hands in creating works that can become a shaping constituent of childhood memories.

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### Oh No, Its Pool Time!! (29-9-98)

Dark inky waters,  
Wretched green tiles  
The pool extends for miles and miles  
and miles.

Sharks lurking here and there,  
Leeches swallowing things everywhere,  
Its all so horrifying, it'll make you  
stare.

Huge horrifying diving boards  
Big waves churning around.  
Ripples whisper in a ghastly sound.

Terrified screams of people drowning,  
Help Mr. and Mrs. Browning,  
You can see the water frowning.

Stinky, stenchy changing rooms  
Filled with chlorine,  
Careful with the kids (if it goes into  
their eyes, they'll scream).

Horrid, horrid gulpers,  
Sickening, sickening screams,  
Jet black waters that throw away the  
sun beams.

Its a nice sunny day  
But I still look glum, guess why?  
ITS POOL TIME TODAY !!!

Dhruv Saran, Class VII, The Shriram  
School, Vasant Vihar.

### Capricorn's Accusation

Capricorn,  
The goat with a horn  
And I have sworn,  
That this sign will,  
Never ever be torn.  
Gemini, Cancer and Aries the Ram,  
Cause quite a lot of scams.  
Scorpio, Libra and Virgo,  
So slow are your brains,  
O' so slow.  
Sagittarius, Aquarius and Taurus the  
bull,  
So cheap you are you're gabs are so  
full.  
Pisces, only you are left and I think  
you're the culprit of the theft!!!!

Dhruv Saran, Class VII, The Shriram  
School, Vasant Vihar.



## He Also Made Films!

Indrani Majumdar

The name of Satyajit Ray, to most people, would evoke only one image: that of a man peering through a camera, a look of rapt attention on his face. Few people outside Bengal know, even today, that for almost twelve hours on most days, he sat in his study, his feet propped up, a writing pad on his knees—writing stories, drawing pictures, forming limericks. When he revived the children's magazine, *Sandesh*, in 1961, he opened the door to a whole new world to the children of Bengal. It was Satyajit Ray, the writer they came to know and love. That he was a renowned film-maker was something the young readers of *Sandesh* did not know, and—at that time—did not much care about.

The strangest thing is that Ray began writing not by choice, but by chance. *Sandesh* was founded by his grandfather. Upendrakishore Raychoudhury, in 1913. Upendrakishore was among the pioneers of children's fiction in Bengal, who raised it to a height that remains unparalleled. Upendrakishore left his legacy to his son, Sukumar, whose talents ran in a different channel. What surfaced in all that he did was his sense of the absurd. *Sandesh* was nurtured by Sukumar until his untimely death in 1923, at the age of 36. After a couple of years, *Sandesh* ceased to be published.

However, it would be wrong to imagine that Ray was a stranger to the world of printing and publishing. He began his career as an advertising man, creating very original and oriental campaigns, writing in-depth film criticism and designing striking book jackets for Signet Press.

It was in the pages of this magazine that the two best known characters in modern Bengali juvenile literature were born: Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku, the scientist and Prodosh C. Mitter (*Feluda*), the detective. But that was not all. Ray went on to write innumerable short stories, novellas, poems and limericks, essays, puzzles, brain-teasers and crosswords. He also proved to be a gifted translator, translating English into Bengali and vice versa with equal ease.

For me and all the other children I knew, those were the years of growing up, of being curious, and wanting to read more and more. There were plenty



of other good writers that we enjoyed reading. But each of us wanted to pounce upon everything that Ray produced. Why did this happen? Was it the novelty of his plots? His characters? Or was it just his language?

It seems to me that more than anything else, it was in the warmth, simplicity, and lucidity of his language that the chief magic of his writing lay. He knew that he was writing for children, but there was never any attempt to over-simplify or to talk down to them.

Added to this were his curious characters. They are totally unique. Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku, an affable old scientist, who lives quietly in Giridih with his old servant and a cat called Newton. But he has an ability to rock international science circles with his astounding inventions. One of them is a pill called 'Miracurof' which can cure any ailment. The other is a weapon called 'Anahilin' which makes an adversary simply vanish into thin air.

Feluda, the best known among Satyajit Ray's characters, is an eagle-eyed sleuth whose wit and intelligence is enough to subdue even the cleverest of criminals. Topshe (his young cousin who acts as his Watson and chief narra-

tor) and Jatayu (a friend who happens to be the writer of best-selling pot-boilers) also come alive in their own way.

The short stories in their content, have a quaint, old world charm which reflects Ray's boyhood fascination with Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle. Professor Shonku, in the author's own words, is "a mild mannered version of Professor Challenger". Unlike his films, his stories do not remain confined to the Bengali milieu. They wander from Calcutta to London to the Sahara to Tokyo and to the uncharted Thokchun Gompa in Tibet.

While his films deal with down to earth simple characters, his stories are peopled with weird monsters, pre-historic creatures, malicious and powerful toys, carnivorous plants, laughing dogs, talking crows.

Then there is a sceptic who slaughters a tame king cobra, only to turn into a cobra himself. The easy routine of another man's life is disrupted by the arrival of an identical 'double', leading to complete disaster. A lonely man's life is dramatically changed when he finds a strange bird with a big bill. A ventriloquist's dummy suddenly turns out to have a life and will of its own. A hunter of ghosts falls prey to the very powers he is trying to seek. Rather remarkably, most of these stories have a recurring motif: that of a bachelor, who lives alone with only a servant for company.

Consciously or otherwise, the filmmaker in Ray comes through virtually in every story, in the way he packs in a wealth of details, and sneaks in information in just a few succinct words. Never, even as a small child, did I ever have to consult a dictionary while reading Ray's stories. All difficult words, facts or concepts were explained beautifully by the author himself. This is particularly true of the Feluda stories. Who knew that so many ordinary, colloquial Bengali expressions had their origins in Urdu, Arabic or Persian words, or that a simple word like



'terraccotta' was really a mixture of a Latin and an Italian word? Also, who knew that there's a fascinating book in Sanskrit on riddles and puzzles titled *Bidagdhamakhanandanam*.

Between 1961 and 1992, Ray wrote 35 Feluda stories, 40 accounts of Shonku's escapades, and nearly a hundred short stories—in addition to numerous poems and limericks. These staggering statistics alone are an indication of the enormity of his success as a writer. However, he did not stop here. Unlike other writers, he embellished each story with eye-catching illustrations. Even the jackets of his books were designed by him. His love of words and passion for puns came thorough in the imaginative titles he chose for his collections of stories, each of which had a dozen tales e.g. *Ek Dojan Goppo* (One Dozen Stories), *Aro Ek Dojan* (Another Dozen), *Ebaro Baro* (Another Twelve), *Aro Baro* (Twelve Again), *Aker Pithe Dui* (One Against Two), *Bah! Baro* (*Bravo!* Twelve), and *Jobor Baro* (Terrific Twelve).

Now when I look back on the years since 1961, I am frequently reminded of the day when I learnt that the same man whose name appeared so often in the pages of *Sandesh*, was going to make a film for children called *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*. "But he only writes stories for us, and draws pictures!" I exclaimed, much taken aback. "Can he also make films?" My sister, who was my informant, sniggered at my ignorance. But even after all these years, I still think that at the age of eight, it was a perfectly valid comment to make.

Indrani Majumdar writes for children.



## A Powerful Altext

Arundhati Deosthale

MEMORIES OF ANNE FRANK: REFLECTIONS OF A CHILDHOOD FRIEND

By Alison Leslie Gold

Scholastic, USA, 1997, pp. 136, price not mentioned.

In an escape bid from oppressive Nazi rule in Germany during World War II, Otto Frank, Anne Frank's father moved to Amsterdam with his family in 1933. Unfortunately, the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940, raiding the Jew refugee annexes and subjecting them to all sorts of brutalities. Anne Frank's diary written between 1942-44 was the single most poignant account of life to emerge from the war after its first publication in 1947, to become a modern classic the world over. Her hidden world in the annex though eclipsed by murkiness of terror, insecurity and deprivation was not unremittingly bleak. Anne and her fellow annexers would try to cope with their shared plight giving hope and help to each other. Shortly before her birthday, Anne died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen camp and her diary abruptly ends there. And the rest of course, is history.

*Memories of Anne Frank*, published half a century later in 1997, tells a story of survival and despite its modest claims comes as a powerful altext and an extension of Anne Frank's story. *Memories of Anne Frank* related by Alison Leslie Gold in the form of reflections of Anne's oldest childhood friend Hannah-Pick-Goslar, has the advantage of a mature retrospective view recounting an unforgettable patch of one's life-history. It may not have the urgency of *Diary of Anne Frank* which certainly overscores, having come first and being closer to the period it related to, but nowhere does one find Hannah's memories of Anne Frank wanting in

intensity of emotion and the inner recesses which haven't really moved away from the experiences and have become a part of one's being. The book celebrates the childhood bond natural camaraderie virtually from age 4 to 13.

Looking at both texts in an attempt to place them in their time and contextual frame one sees that though Anne Frank was a greater part of Hannah's world than she i.e., 'Hanneli' or 'Lies' was Anne's, the book doesn't come as memories of Anne Frank alone—it comes as a corresponding timescape of a shared past namely the neighbourhood in Amsterdam and later the abrupt clandestine meetings at the Bergen-Belsen camp. Also there is a certain degree of juxtaposition as is only natural between two teenagers relating to their times each in her own way. While Anne comes across as a typical adolescent, rebellious, lively and vocal of her maladjustments with the shroudings, Hannah is quiet, precocious and by her own admission 'fun loving but also quite religious'. May be her role as an elder sister who's frequently reminded of her responsibility towards the siblings while braving the threat to her own existence prevails over everything else.

The book opens with the morning of 7th July, 1942 and goes on to describe a typical day in Amsterdam's Jewish citizenry with the mandatory wearing of the Star of David for the Jews which Hannah felt proud to wear but knew that it made her conspicuous like a target at a shooting range. As the day progresses her mother's warning, "Take care Hanneli! The Germans are picking up Jews on the street and sending them God knows where" rings true. Hannah discovers that Anne and her family have disappeared all of a sudden and without a trace, presumably to migrate to Switzerland. 'It was impossible to hold back the flood of tears and sensation of panic' she notes, absorbing the painful shock with restraint. Parting with friends and the people one has known becomes habit. Her psyche had to brave many a scar but equally strong is her quiet resolve to fight the fear and uncertainty in her own way trying to be a good, responsible young adult especially after her mother's sudden death at childbirth. Alongside are the teenager peer group ice-cream binges and freak outs to look at 'cute-looking guys, Hanukkah celebrations and such other

breathers.

There are everyday experiences, described with remarkable economy of words which convey a lot beyond the text. For example, she revokes an incident: "One time Hannah was returning from the vegetable shop. She walked on familiar cobblestones set in a herringbone pattern when she saw an older couple she knew by sight stopped by the soldiers. She knew that right before the war these people had used their entire life's savings to arrange paper and passage for their grown children and grandchildren to go to America. Now they were alone and penniless.

"Your identity card!" the soldier barked. People crossed the street or hurried off. What would the soldier do when he saw the "J" stamped inside their identity cards. Hannah felt her stomach clench as the couple was shoved towards an open truck. The soldier hit the old man when he didn't move fast enough. Hannah's feet were like cement blocks. Her heart pounded. Her face was white as flour; her knees were buckling. Hannah wished her family and all the Jews would run away while there was still time"

Hannah misses Anne in more than one way. At school, at teenage pranks, at sharing existential anxieties and in the stolen moments of sheer fun. She sees the number of children in her school getting less each passing day and her heart sinks every time she sees someone missing. Life just goes on getting tougher. If Amsterdam got bombed, the Jew couldn't as much as go to the public raid shelter. Entry to any public place was forbidden.

Moving to a mud-mosquito infested transit camp called Westerbork in Eastern Holland with her younger sister Gabi and her grandmother, she has to play child-mother to both. Life seems to be an unending story of terror and tension and Hannah's survival kit comprises her own grit and the humanness of a few people like Mrs. Abrahams around her. Hannah has to work as a toilet cleaner in an orphanage, meeting her father occasionally and drawing some emotional support from him. Near-starvation makes her weak and dizzy and then comes a battle against deadly diseases like jaundice, dehydration and typhus. Being driven on from one camp to the next becomes part of life.

In February 1945, Hannah gets an

unbelievable flash of news that Anne has also been brought to the Bergen-Belsen camp. The two friends meet on the sly with a lot of trepidation and excitement in their hearts, though on either side of the wall, unable to see each other. Hannah gets to know of the failed escape bid of Anne's family. The girls share as much as they can in the next two or three similar brief meetings which follow. This dramatic reunion also includes a touching encounter. On hearing of Anne's starvation Hannah somehow manages to scrounge a few scraps of food and throws the package across the wall but as luck would have it, it falls in the hands of another starving woman who grabs it and runs away with it. And the next attempt has to wait for a few more days when they ultimately succeed.

Anne and Hannah have to part again as abruptly as they had met. Hannah has to leave Bergen-Belsen to move on to the next camp. Then comes a gloomy spell of hardships and a spate of illnesses. Ironically enough, its again at the hospital where joy re-enters Hannah's life. The war ends. Anne's father visits her, bringing her bad news. Anne and her sister Margot are dead. Otto Frank later almost becomes a surrogate father to Hannah and her sister!

Hannah, after migrating to Switzerland, catches up with life, lives till a ripe age to write her story with a hope that "perhaps this book will add to the knowledge of Anne Frank, will fill in what really happened—as horrible as it was—to my friend after the diary ends."

Arundhati Deosthale is in publishing.

## Neglected Flowers

Anupa Lal

KUSUM

By Dipavali Debroy

Children's Book Trust, 1997, pp.-----, Rs. 30.00



“Always mind your own business,” said Mummy, “especially if there is something wrong, as there seems to be.” But minding her own business was just what Arushi didn't do...

This, more or less, could have been the start to any number of children's books in which a spirited youngster goes on to solve a mystery, nab a thief, discover hidden treasure, rescue someone in distress etc., etc.

Arushi does one of these things. But the book in which she features, *Kusum*, written by Dipavali Debroy and published by Children's Book Trust is not the usual, run-of-the-mill adventure story for children. What sets it apart is its sincerity, its ability to face uncomfortable social realities and offer credible solutions.

Arushi and Kusum become friends in Burdwan, where Arushi is spending her summer holidays. Kusum accompanies Arushi and her mother when they return to Delhi, as a prospective maid for the Guptas, Arushi's neighbours.

The Guptas, a middle class family like Arushi's, are looking for a young girl, about 12 or 13, to do all their housework. She should preferably be from a small town, not know anyone in Delhi (so that she is in effect, entirely dependent on them), and be content with a couple of hundred rupees a month as salary.

Kusum's family is very poor, her father is unemployed and they need the money Kusum could earn, working for the Guptas.

It is Arushi's idea to take Kusum back to Delhi. In her enthusiasm and ignorance, she does not realize that social pressures will not let the two girls remain friends.

Kusum is more worldly wise. At her very first meal in Arushi's house, she stays away from the dining table, despite Arushi's calling her, and only sits down to eat on the floor in the kitchen, when Arushi and her parents have eaten.

Through many such little incidents, Dipavali Debroy anchors the story in reality.

Kusum begins work for the Guptas a day after reaching Delhi. As the months pass, a bewildered Arushi witnesses her friend's growing unhappiness and her exploitation at the hands of the Guptas. But no one, other than Arushi, seems to care. Her parents instruct her not to poke her nose into other people's affairs, not to get involved. How can Kusum be her friend, when there is a world of difference between the lives of the two girls?

What happens then, how Arushi finally manages to 'rescue' Kusum, how the problems of Kusum's family are resolved—make for absorbing reading.

Embedded in the story of *Kusum* are social issues that would be unwise and short-sighted of us to ignore. As Arushi's father says to Kusum's father at the end of the story:

“The whole thing is wrong. People like the Guptas, wanting to keep children as domestic servants; people like us, getting them such children to work; and people like you, letting your children go out to work—all of us are responsible. All of us are party to the same offence, depriving a child of its rights. We are all responsible for the present state of affairs.”

There may be laws in India on child labour, framed as early as 1933, but they apply to organized and large-scale labour. Lakhs of children in domestic service like Kusum cannot benefit from them.

Kusum is poor, she is a child and she is a girl. Tragically in India today, there is scope for exploitation on all three counts.

Arushi's mother disapproves of Kusum's wearing frocks, however long, in Delhi and even within the house, in front of Mr. Gupta. Where then is the child safe?

If this book has one major fault, it is the flat, lacklustre style of narration. A vibrant, individual style need not be sacrificed at the altar of simplicity in a book for children. The two can co-exist. There are passages which have both feeling and rhythm:

“Her voice broke. “She is a good girl, our Kusum. Always a smile on her face.

Never answers back, however much you scold. Never says ‘I can't, whatever you ask her to do. Yet such is her luck...’ She wiped her eyes on her sari. “Year after year she has gone without any new clothes, day after day she has gone hungry.”

But such passage are rare. The illustrations by Subir Roy are also lacklustre and do nothing to enhance the text. It is shameful that the right amount of inspiration and effort hardly ever goes into the production of children's books in India.

But perhaps it is unrealistic to expect anything else when children themselves, both socially advantaged and disadvantaged, are more the step-child-

dren of Indian society. They may have civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that are internationally recognized. But these rights are by and large, only on paper.

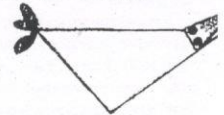
We deny our children their rights in many different ways. As we continue to pollute our environment, brutalize society, make a mockery of education—the hardest hit are the young. Books like *Kusum* can sensitize them to the plight of other children, less privileged than them.

But what will it take to sensitize us to our neglect of tomorrow's citizens?

Anupa Lal has been writing for children since the early seventies.

## Talking to Arup Kumar Dutta

Neena De



You would never guess from his demeanour that Arup Kumar Dutta is a very successful author. This mild-mannered and unassuming person has won international acclaim for his children's stories. He has also written books for adults involving serious scholarship like *Unicornis* and *Chai Garam* which have been very well received.

Though he has been called “Our Own Blyton” by *Illustrated Weekly* in 1989, he is not very flattered by the comparison. “A whole generation of Indian children were bred on her simply because there was nothing else for them to read” he regrets, “I wanted to create a body of children's fiction with an authentic Indian background which would fit better in this milieu and provide some values to children at the same time.” He is certainly achieving what he set out to do. *Reader's Digest* declares that now, children can be weaned away from Enid Blyton to more convincing, more challenging adventures like *Trouble At Kolongijan* by this writer. Critics who rued the dearth of children's stories for Indian children at one time have acknowledged that “the winds of welcome change in ‘the Indian writing in English for children scene’ were blown in by the publication of (his) book *The Kaziranga Trail* in 1979.”

Dutta based himself in the North-East though he had the option of living elsewhere because he wanted to write about the region that was his home and project it to the outside world. Very few people know about it though it has a lot to offer. When you read stories like *The Crystal Cave* which is a charming story set in Arunachal, you can see how well

he loves the hills and forests of the land and how much he respects the simple folk, their traditions, beliefs and culture. He makes the dense jungles of Assam come alive in his stories, and sets his adventures in the sanctuaries, tea gardens or the banks of the river swollen by the monsoon rains. We learn of Elephant Kheda or trapping in the hills, the many vibrant festivals of people still close to the earth, their knowledge of medicinal herbs, their hopes and their fears. His Japanese translator Chitose Suzuki, herself a well known writer, declares that this is what makes the books so popular in her country. “They provide refreshing images to the Japanese readers, in fact it is the literary force of books like *The Kaziranga Trail* that has formed a link of cooperation between India and Japan.”

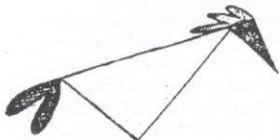
As he shows me his books, many of which have been translated into Japanese, Russian, Hungarian, Czech and German, he suppresses a shy smile when I hold up one of the Japanese books and wonder why the drawing on the cover looks upside-down, “you turn the book the other way and read it from the back to the front” he points out. The two books he handles with particular care are on special paper and feel very light. “Can you tell me what these are? These are most precious to me,” he says. Appropriately one of these is *The Blind Witness*, the story of a blind boy printed in braille in Japan.

For a person who was paid Rs.40 for his first story by *Caravan* magazine, “Love And Death In The Mountains”, a rather silly and romantic tale he calls it, he has certainly come a long way. Starting with the prestigious Shankar's

Award for his first book *The Kaziranga Trail*, he has won many prizes for his books. He is a prolific, full time writer with twelve children's adventure stories and just as many books for adults published already. *Kaziranga Trail* was followed by *Trouble At Kolongijan*, *The Blind Witness*, *Lure of Zangrila*, *Revenge*, *Smack*, *A Story About Tea*, *Save The Pool*, *Oh Deer*, *A Prince's Tale* and lastly, *The Crystal Cave*. He has been approached by Scholastic International, the biggest publishers for children's books for stories which he is writing now. Some of his books have been made into films and tele-serials. Although they have done well too, he does not seem pleased at all with the results of the transition of his stories from one media to another and thinks his books got distracted in the process.

It is obvious that Dutta understands his twelve year old and above children very well though he is quick to point out, "I am no psychologist. He knows that they have grown beyond the point where they would no longer readily accept a speaking mouse as part of their fantasy world. The fantasies created by the author for them must now be tempered with a dose of realism. Fantasy is still very important but it takes the form of situations like a computer whizkid getting kidnapped or an odyssey to recover a lost statue. Much as he hates to preach to the children since they get lectured enough at home, the classroom and the playground, he feels some values like the meaning of friendship, love for animals and a concern for the environment, amongst others must form the "thematic core" of the story. When asked if he has a definite plan according to which he works, he says, "Oh no, I have to keep the basic plot in mind but when I sit down to write, the book takes on a life of its own which I am bound to follow." Children love his books. They read them for fun, use them as textbooks, and have them as supplementary readers as far away as Japan. One thing he is confident of, despite the distractions of the visual media, is that books are here to stay. "After all, you cannot keep a television set under your pillow when you go to sleep." The number of copies of his books sold, bear testimony to this.

Neena De is a free lance critic based in Guwahati.



## The Changing Face of the Fable

Shama Futehally



THE ANIMAL FABLE IN MODERN LITERATURE

By Marie Fernandes

B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1996, pp. 232, Rs. 250.00

In this age of fabulism, the fable appears to have escaped from the safe, picture-book landscape it has inhabited so far. It used to be seen as children's literature, or moralizing literature (good for you, sure, but only when you could find the time). And there is something furry and rough-tongued about this escape: the tigers and unicorns of Jorge Luis Borges have pounced into our drawing-rooms as no literary beast would earlier have dared to do. I remember the excitement of reading Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (some twenty years ago?) and explaining passionately, to anyone who would listen, that although it was about rabbits, it was not a children's story, it was a proper novel about grown-up rabbits. I remember also how its author recreated the world at rabbit-level, so that what the book finally said about environmental destruction was not just a message but a lived experience.

The second thing that has happened to the fable is that its message has moved with the times. There is no doubt that Aesop and the Panchatantra said some splendid things, but to us their morals seem so universal as to be pleasantly easy to ignore. But George Orwell and James Thurber have produced fables which deal with our kind of politics, our kind of intrigue, even with our own refusal to believe in fables. This has blurred, in another way, the distinction between fable and life.

The third thing that has happened is that we have discovered sub-texts. This has of course happened to everything, even to fairy stories, and we have recently been chastened by learning why we really rejoice in the victory of Red Riding Hood, of what we were actually up to when we applauded Jack on his beanstalk. In the case of the animal story, this means that *The Jungle Book*, for instance, no longer remains a rattling good yarn, it also provides a (surprisingly credible) reading of Kipling's life-story and Kipling's politics.

All this becomes apparent in a very straight-forward way on reading this

book. Marie Fernandes has dealt with *The Jungle Book*, with Walter de la Mare's *The Three Royal Monkeys*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Thurber's fables and three books by Richard Adams. The strength of her book lies in its careful collating of a vast number of critical works and in presenting the relevant ideas from them simply and clearly. This will undoubtedly make it a very useful volume for anyone who is studying these texts. (I might add here that the bibliography provides evidence of an impressive amount of reference)

So the section on *The Jungle Books* for instance discovers the threads of the story in tales told about India by Lockwood Kipling to his son. It connects Kipling's own uneasy position between British and Indian with Mowgli's uneasy position between village and jungle. It finds the hierarchy of the jungle analogous to the caste system, it even discovers that the actions of the animals are divided according to the principles of the super-ego and the... and it manages to make it all stick.

In the discussion of Orwell's *Animal*

*There is no doubt that Aesop and the Panchatantra said some splendid things, but to us their morals seem so universal as to be pleasantly easy to ignore. But George Orwell and James Thurber have produced fables which deal with our kind of politics, our kind of intrigue, even with our own refusal to believe in fables. This has blurred, in another way, the distinction between fable and life.*

*Farm*, too, the biographical facts prove unexpectedly relevant. The writer stresses not just the story's parallels with Communist Russia, but—perhaps a shade less convincingly—those with British India—Orwell's parodying of the Bible is carefully detailed, and provides a counterpoint to the shades of Scripture which surface in *Watership Down*. The theme of the Quest, the theme of dream and vision, of wise leadership by an apparently weak member of the community: these emerge in many of the books under discussion. In the same way, the theme of political power appears to be common to all the books which have been looked at, although treatment varies widely. The approach in *Animal Farm* for instance, makes an interesting contrast to that of Thurber's fables, which attack the anti-Communist paranoia of the McCarthy era. And Kipling's caste system is solidly different from the allegory of the British civil service which informs *Watership Down*.

Indeed, the linking of these themes is so illuminating that it might even have been worthwhile organizing the book 'vertically' and writing each chapter around a theme, rather than around a text.

One special little pleasure which the book provides is its synopsis of Thurber's fables. For those of us who do not know the originals, here is a sampling.

"A young tortoise who has read the fable (*The Tortoise and the Hare*) is led to believe that he can outrun a hare. After many days he finally meets a hare and challenges him to a race. The tortoise is an idealist and a dreamer. The hare is pragmatic and witty, 'What are you going to use for legs?', he asks the tortoise. He disregards the ancient story. 'Tosh', he says, you could not go fifty feet in an hour and a half, whereas I can go fifty feet in one and a fifth seconds'. The fable ends with the hare having crossed the finish line and the tortoise having gone approximately eight and three-quarter inches. The moral: 'A new broom may sweep clean, but never trust an old saw.'"

Incidentally, in *Beastly Tales from Here and There*, Vikram Seth provides a delightful Nineties version of the same fable—one where the Hare loses all right, but, pretty and seductive as she is, manages at the end to corner the celebrityhood and the movie rights under the nose of the worthy Tortoise. And can there be a more appropriate end to a discussion of the fable in 1998?

Shama Futehally a writer and translator is the author of *Tara Lane* and has translated the poems of Mirabai.



## In the Traditional Motif

Brinda Dutta

EYES ON THE PEACOCK'S TAIL  
1997, pp. 24, Rs. 60.00

MAGIC VESSELS  
1997, pp. 24, Rs. 60.00

A CURLY TALE  
1998, pp. 24, Rs. 60.00

HISS, DON'T BITE  
1998, pp. 24, Rs 60

All published by Tulika Publishers, Chennai



As a child growing up in the forties, I lived in a secret magical world, which came alive for me twice a day. Each night my grandmother told me a story and during story hour at school, my teacher Miss Bailey, did the same. The worlds of their stories were radically different. From Grandma I heard of Tenali Raman, of Vikramaditya, of Raakshasas. At school sitting around Miss Bailey I was transported to England. Her stories featured King Arthur, Goldilocks, or Winnie the Pooh. Both worlds were real to me. I saw an eccentric uncle, the elephant in the neighbourhood temple or Jim Tigers at Muharum, in Grandma's Goldilocks stories and I also knew why Goldilocks was so named. Hadn't I a friend called Lillian whose "golden" hair was set in ringlets? Life at school—service in the chapel or grace at table, dancing the sailors hornpipe and as I grew older, "socials", were all straight out of the School Girls Omnibus that I devoured. A world that was second hand, but real for a young girl in a "pavadai" and pig tails. That world disappeared gradually after Independence. Lillian and her family left, tearfully, for Australia. And my grandmother's world of Indian folk and mythical heroes is now encapsulated in *Amar Chitra Katha*. Today's grandma is probably a successful C.E.O. who gifts Dr. Seuss or Roald Dahl to her grand daughter.

The point is, what stories do we want our children to listen to? To read? What will be the texture of their magical world? Surely it is not the world of the tube, or a diet solely of Enid Blyton or Hardy boys! I'd like to believe that we want to share with them the wealth

of the stories rooted in our culture, so that they move from Tun Tunis Book to Grimm with familiarity and ease—truly children of the new century. Unfortunately what is available in English [I hasten to add] is limited. Literature for the young in regional languages is rich and varied, though hardly enjoyed in the "Metropolitan" homes. Could this be due to the parents not having enjoyed it themselves? Which is why it is such a pleasure to read four of the books for little children published by Tulika titled "Under the Banyan".

The books reviewed here are a set of four folk tales from Bihar, Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. Vayu Naidu, the writer, has impeccable credentials. A Ph.D. [Leeds] in oral traditions of India and founder of Brumhalata Inter-cultural Story Telling Company based in Birmingham, U.K. The four stories are not run of the mill folk tales. I'd not heard of or read "Hiss don't Bite" or "Eyes on the Peacock's Tail". The other two tales are from Bihar and Tamil Nadu and are variants of well-known and well-loved stories. Vayu uses simple and easy to understand English and she has taken pains to have the story reflect the language and the social mores of the state it is from. For example the use of Tamil words or the mention of foods instantly identified as South Indian, or naming of flowers like the Kadamba; so special to West Bengal.

The books are very "little user friendly"—small enough for tiny hands and exquisitely illustrated. This in itself is a big bonus. The child is led into the vibrant visual world of folk art of each state; Madhubani for Bihar, Kalighat styles for Bengal, adaptations of clay sculptures for Tamilnadu and

the Parh paintings for Rajasthan. The illustrator is Mugda Shah of N.I.D. Ahmedabad. Each of the books has a traditional motif incorporated in the inside covers. Fish for Bengal, kolam for Tamil Nadu, "Paan" leaf for Bihar, and peacocks for Rajasthan. Mugda has an eye for detail and each illustration will have children asking questions, absorbing with pleasure a past that is being swiftly eroded or enshrined in museums. The colours leap at one. A five-year-old, whom I lent the folktale from Rajasthan to, kept caressing the pages. "I can feel the colours", she said, when I asked her why she was doing so.

The accompanying audiotapes feature that splendid singer Usha Uthup. I was pleasantly surprised to find that she is a good narrator too. The song "On warm summer nights" has a catchy tune which kids can easily sing along with. [The lyrics come along with the cassette] Each story has a small song enforcing the theme of the story, and is sung midway through the narration. The music by Narayan Parasuram is lively, and carries traces of the music of the state the story is from. For instance the music for the story "Magic Vessel" is identifiably Tamil, so for the non-Tamil listeners, it is a gentle introduction to the sounds of the South.

Having said all this, I must confess that I often wished the language of the stories was more colloquial. Storytelling lends itself to "repetitions", to a line, a phrase that is central to the story and crops up at every new turn and twist in the tale. What's lost in these books is the music and the cadences of the spoken word. Perhaps in her quest for simplicity, Vayu emphasized the story element, rather than the language.

Another niggling question was that of Jadhvi Bhai in "A Curly Tale". Why does he become a Bhooth? This is never clearly explained.

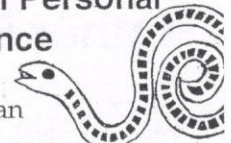
However, these are small matters, which do not detract from the pleasure these stories give. If you have a very special little person in your life, surprise the little one with a gift of one of the folk tales. It's guaranteed to delight and entertain.

Brinda Dutta is a senior member of the staff at Sardar Patel School, New Delhi.



## Learning Through Personal Experience

Indira Haran



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU BREATHE?  
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CATCH A COLD?  
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU EAT?  
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LISTEN?

By Joy Richardson

Learners Press, New Delhi, 1998,  
Rs.35.00

Children learn easily when they can relate a subject to their daily lives and to something that happens to them personally. All the subjects dealt with in these books are experienced by children and are about things that they often wonder about. Since all these books are written in the same format by Joy Richardson, I will review them collectively.

These books are very informative and explain some of the complex functions of the body in a manner easily understood by children in primary school. The illustrations are colourful and well labeled and children will enjoy looking at the pictures.

Each book explains what happens to the child when he/she breathes, catches a cold, eats or listens and also about the organs that are involved in each process. Small experiments using items which are available at home are described in this book to help the children in understanding the functions of the body. For e.g.: In the book *What happens when you breathe*, the following experiment is given to explain the function of the lungs: Fix plastic bags to the ends of two plastic straws or pieces of tubing. Put the other ends in your mouth. Breathe out and in. Watch the bags fill up and empty like a pair of lungs.

In the book *What happens when you listen*, you are asked to hook an elastic band over a door handle and stretch it out. You are then asked to pluck the elastic band and watch it vibrate while it makes sound. When the elastic band vibrates it sets off vibrations in the air and the sound is carried to your ears.

Each book has an alphabetical index at the end so children get used to looking up topics which interest them like taste buds, sneeze and voice box. The price is quite affordable. These books will certainly be a valuable addition to any children's library.

Indira Haran is Librarian, Delhi Public School, Vasant Vihar.

# A Tree, The Sea and Mother Earth

Deepa Agrawal

A TREE IN MY VILLAGE

Written and illustrated by Paritosh Sen

Tulika Publishers, Chennai, 1998, pp. 32, Rs. 140.00

SURESH AND THE SEA

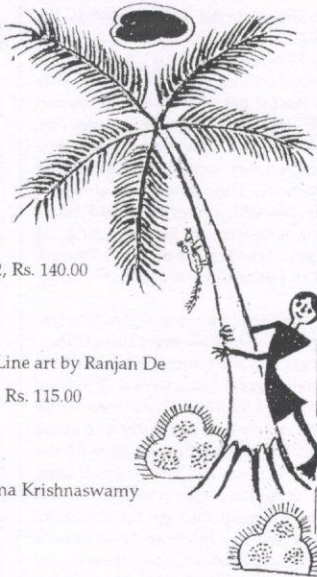
By Raghavendra Rao and Sandhya Rao. Line art by Ranjan De

Tulika Publishers, Chennai, 1998, pp. 48, Rs. 115.00

AND LAND WAS BORN

Retold by Sandhya Rao, illustrated by Uma Krishnaswamy

Tulika Publishers, pp. 16, Rs. 175.00



Trees, the sea and Mother Earth herself—these are all potent symbols of our being and our inescapable relationship with nature. While the three books under consideration are quite different in their approach, each provides deep insights into our link with the environment. At the same time one cannot help wondering how the prospective readers, probably urban children—who cannot ever hope to find time from their busy routine of school work and home work, coupled with the plethora of improving activities their parents feel compelled to load them with, to sit under a tree and watch that microcosm of life that it contains—will respond to them. With a sense of wonder, one hopes and renewed awareness of the world around them.

*A Tree in my Village* is a childhood reminiscence with a special focus on nature, written and illustrated by the famous artist Paritosh Sen.

The writer's fascination with the giant Arjun tree in his village comes across vividly through his descriptions as well as through the amazing illustrations that make this book a visual treat. The tree, which acquires almost mythical overtones, is a minor world in itself. As the author says, "It was so huge, so dense, that it seemed like a small forest...Its powerful build, magnificent proportions and statuesque three dimensionality were reminiscent of that monolithic ninth century Jaina figure at Sravanabelagola in Mysore."

Such comparisons place the tree firmly in perspective and provide a

vivid sense of its powerful effect on a young child. The author goes on to describe the lives of the creatures that inhabited it, who were such a source of fascination to him as a boy. What is wonderful is the fact that the child comes across as being absolutely sure and confident of his relationship with the complex world of ants and buzzards and langurs and their infinitely absorbing daily existence. He is as intimately linked with them, as they are with each other. The matter-of-fact way in which he picks up the wounded bird and applies traditional herbal remedies to it is quite different from the contrived situations one often finds in books on the 'environment' specially written to improve children. This is because the author is writing spontaneously about a familiar, well loved world, unhampered by the demands of a worthy purpose at the back of his mind. He is writing about a world he knows and loves and understands, with the result that one is spared the plastic and stereotyped images of the 'environment' which result when a book is strung together after reading a few articles on the subject. Nature 'red in tooth and claw' is depicted honestly, not artificially romanticized to present a false image to children. The battle between the 'seemingly innocent and harmless' birds and the langurs who are trying to invade their territory is vividly and realistically depicted. Similarly, the war of the ants. At the end, the author nostalgically sums up what the tree meant to him and how the memory "... opens up a thousand

locked doors of the joy of life."

Thus, apart from giving a child an artist's eye view of one of nature's remarkable creations—it also provides a highly perceptive glimpse into the complex world of nature, which city children sadly miss out on.

The hard cover book is beautifully produced. Words, phrases and references which a child may not understand are explained at the end of the book. The glossary and a list of books on similar subjects are additional useful inputs. However, the price, Rs.140, is rather steep.

*Suresh and the Sea*, by Raghavendra Rao and Sandhya Rao is a true life tale of another relationship—between a fisherboy and Kadalamma, Ocean Mother. It is basically a book of information, a peep into the life of a young boy who lives in the village of Injambakkam, which lies about 10 km south of Chennai.

The fisherfolk depend on the sea, which provides them with a livelihood. They are so finely attuned to her ways and moods that they even forgive her vagaries, forgive her even when she is destructive. After all, she is Ocean Mother who nurtures them, so has the right to punish them too, occasionally.

Suresh's education begins early with his small kattumaram, or fishing boat which his father fashions for him. He goes on to develop an understanding of the sea and its sounds, so important for fishermen. The ritual initiation at the age of eleven, an important rite of passage as well as the special problems small fishermen face because of mechanized fishing techniques, and the ways of fisherfolk in different parts of the world are simply and clearly described. As also their deep and abiding relationship with the sea.

As Suresh says, "The net is cast and you wait for the fish. Dawn breaks and slowly the sun rides up the sky. The waves ripple in the soft breeze. It is so quiet, so peaceful. And you are tired and hungry. My mother's cooking never tastes as good as when we eat it in the middle of the sea." An almost idyllic picture.

And yet, we are told, things are changing. The simple, old way of life is gradually being phased out. Suresh's family has raised a loan to buy an outboard motor to be able to go further into the sea and move faster. And Suresh's dream is to possess a fibre glass boat. Remarkably, no judgement is made by the authors, even though we are told that "The tall palmyra groves are almost gone." At the same time, we are informed that "technology bodes well and ill for the small fisherman."

It is worth noting that this is purely a man's world. Girls are given rides

only on festivals. They handle the finances, the selling of the fish. A clear definition of gender roles.

The remarkable photographs make the world of the fisherfolk come alive. And the little snippets of information given below provide a more complete picture. A well produced and well designed book which should provide absorbing reading for kids.

*And Land was Born* is a delight to hold and look at. A tribal tale on the creation of land, it is beautifully illustrated in the style of the original paintings of the Bhilalas, the tribe to whom this story belongs. Folk art always provokes a visceral response and thought it is often said that children prefer realistic illustrations, any child would surely enjoy these colourful patterns and comic figures which are close to their own artistic efforts. The earthy colours are dramatic and eye-catching, and well suited to the story which is being illustrated.

This is a genesis tale with a difference, shot through with zany humour and delicious fantasy. It is about the quest of the *jugni matas*, or the mothers of the universe, for dry land for the animals and humans and birds who are tired of living in water all the time and always being wet. They approach God, who is fast asleep and will not wake up. This irreverent depiction of the Supreme Being is one of the most delightful aspects of the story. In a world as imperfect as ours, it seems more appropriate to have a God who gets irritable when He cannot solve a problem and needs to consult an astrologer, rather than an infallible being who never goes wrong! When He is told he will not find land, he tries to evade the *jugni matas*. They, however, will not be shaken off that easily. And God has to admit defeat! Well, there are some problems even He cannot solve.

After several twists and turns and those unexpected, inexplicable happenings, which form part of the peculiar logic of folk tales the determined *jugni matas* succeed in their quest. "And land was born. As wind and rain touched it, the land grew. Slowly, trees began to dot the earth, and grass and shrubs and herbs..."

A charming and entertaining tale which children are bound to enjoy, though the book seems very highly priced at Rs.175.

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



## The Colours of Joy

The colours spill over the table and sheets of paper lie crumpled under my feet. Children, their hands smeared with colour, laugh and shout as they hold up their paintings for display. I have just finished an art class with my students and though the classroom looks like a battlefield we have created wonderful works of art and greatly enjoyed ourselves. We have seen rain fall on green fields, walked in a garden full of strange flowers, met new friends with crooked noses and button eyes, eaten fruit from tiny trees with giant leaves. The process of painting is a powerful teaching tool and helps children with disabilities to experience a new world. Besides giving them endless hours of fun, it enables them to develop their hand-eye coordination and communication skills. When I first began to teach art to disabled children I was not sure how to go about it since I had no training as an art teacher or special educator. But despite my lack of experience I found this was one of the



easiest and most enjoyable art activities I had ever done. All children love drawing and painting if you allow them to do it in their own way but children with mental and physical disabilities enjoy it much more because it is one of the few activities they can do on their own. Ever since I began doing art workshops, seven years ago, for very Special Arts India, an organization that runs projects in art, music and theater for various special schools, I have never come across a child who does not want to paint. Each child has his or her own method of approaching a painting and most of them, however disabled, are very particular about their choice of colours. Ritika, a young girl with Down's Syndrome, loves yellow and I always have to make sure there is plenty of bright yellow in the paint box for her, otherwise she will refuse to work. She paints with confidence and is always eager to share her view with the other children. But Pritish is a shy boy with multiple disabilities but his fading eyesight and limited arm movement does not stop him from painting with skill. All I do is place a tray of crayons on his desk and leave him alone. Slowly, with painstaking effort he picks up the colours he wants and draws with total concentration. Art activities bring so much joy to a disabled child that it can often motivate a child with severe disabilities to make that extra effort and sometimes even overcome a minor handicap. The process of painting not only creates a sense of self worth, it also allows the child to think at a different, often more complex level. It teaches him to use his imagination not just in his painting but in other real life situations as well. Pooja, a hearing impaired girl who can pronounce only a few sounds, will explain her painting with expressive gestures in case I have missed out something.

Children love showing off their finished works of art and this is where they need genuine appreciation. I lavish praise on each work and sometimes when my words are not good enough, I get a small nudge, or worse, a hurt look from my students. Many of them do not know my name and some of them cannot remember who I am right after I leave the class but they recognize my bag. The minute I enter the class they greet the bag filled with brushes, crayons and paintboxes with shouts of joy and rush forward to touch it. My art bag is filled with magic for them and they know by instinct that it carries all the things they need to feel happy and able, even if it is just for a few hours.

*Bulbul Sharma is a well-known writer and illustrator.*



## The Find

By Pratibha Nath



Nitai stood at the far end of his grandfather's paddy fields. All around him the fresh green paddy plants waved in the breeze. The sky was a cloudless, brilliant blue. Nitai could tell it was around midday, for the sun was right overhead. And behind him, grandfather's coconut palms threw only the smallest shadows. Nitai knew that shadows lengthened as the sun travelled west. When it finally sank behind the bamboo thickets, shadows swallowed everything. His entire village with its twenty odd huts, cowsheds, the Kali temple, the village pond—they were all plunged into darkness.

Nitai did not like the dark. When it was dark, he had to stay indoors. He was not allowed to go out and play. His father and grandfather came back from a bath at the stream behind their hut and they all had their evening meal. But Nitai never enjoyed the meal because his father kept asking, "Did you go to school today? What did you learn? I'll ask Master Moshai if you are making good progress or not. Come on, tell me, you good for nothing fellow, did you learn anything today?"

Nitai could not answer his father's questions because he never did go to school. He hated school. He disliked being cooped up in a small hut in order to learn from a book. He knew the Bengali alphabet, he knew simple addition and subtraction. When his mother sent him to the village grocer to buy salt or tea leaves, he always brought back the correct change. What more did he have to learn?

From the far end of the paddy fields Nitai could see his hut. His mother stood in the open doorway. Maybe she was calling out to him, 'Nitai, Nitai'. Perhaps the rice was ready early and she wanted him to come and eat while it was still hot. But he did not want to go home and eat. The sun was still warm. It would be fun to swim in the pond just now. Maybe he could catch a few small fish for a nice spicy curry with the evening meal for him. Nitai turned his back on his grandfather's paddy fields and set off towards the village pond.

The pond was a fifteen minute walk from Nitai's hut. There was a huge banyan tree close by. People believed that the tree was haunted so they did not like to go near it, even in the daytime. But Nitai was not afraid. That afternoon when he found the pond deserted, he was delighted. He took off

his shirt, threw it on the ground and jumped into the pond. For a long time Nitai swam about in the water. When he had had enough, he climbed on to the bank again. Digging into his bag he took out a gamchha (fine towel) because it could be used for catching fish. He held the two ends in his hands and allowed the gamchha to float tidily in the water. The moment a fish swam on to the towel, Nitai immediately shot to his feet, lifting the towel out of the water, so the fish was held as in a net. He had often caught fish that way. But on that particular afternoon, he seemed to be out of luck. There were hardly any fish around. Perhaps the sun was too warm and they were resting at the bottom of the pond. Suddenly Nitai lost his patience. He threw away the gamchha, took a deep breath, held it and dived headlong into the pond. "I'll catch the fish, wherever they are," he thought. "Grab them with my bare hands, that's what I'll do."

The water stung his eyes and something rang in his ears as he fumbled among the pebbles at the bottom of the pond. But there were no fish to be seen. Nitai surfaced, gasping for breath. For a few moments he sat on the bank. Then he walked to the other end of the pond. Once again he took a deep breath, held it and dived headlong into the pond. At the bottom he ran into a lot of tiny fish and sent them scurrying in different directions. Nitai gave chase but they were too quick for him. Disappointed again, Nitai rose to the surface. "Not my day for fish curry," he thought.

But as he swam to the surface, something caught his eye. Clinging to the sides of the pond were some strange looking shells. Nitai wanted to pick up a few but he was really out of wind and had to rush back to the top again. Back on the edge of the pond, Nitai wiped the water from his face. A shiver ran through his body. He was cold. How he wished to wipe himself down with the dry ends of the gamchha, put on his shirt and head home. His mother must be worrying about him. . . . But those shells. How could he go without those shells? For the third time Nitai took a deep breath, held it and dived.

The shells came off easily enough. Four of them. Nitai grabbed two in each hand and made a dash upwards. Half way up one of the shells nearly slipped out of his grasp and in trying to grab it again, Nitai lost valuable time.

Just before he cleared the surface of the water he completely ran out of wind, gasped and took in a good gulp of water. Back on the edge of the pond, he threw himself on the ground and closed his eyes. His head swam and his legs folded up in an involuntary cramp. But the shells were safe under him.

When Nitai woke up, the sun hung low in the sky and the breeze was cool. He rose quickly to get his shirt and there were the shells on the grass, where he had been lying. Black and grey coloured shells. Four of them, all different in size. The largest was some four fingers in length from end to end. They were really two shells each, placed one over the other, edge on edge and closed tight. From his sling bag he took out a small pen knife which he always carried around for whittling sticks or making whistles from reeds. He picked up the smallest shell. Inserting the tip of the knife at the mouth of the shell he prised it open. There was a layer of some moist, smooth, greyish stuff inside. Nitai threw it away. The second shell was the same. And the third, Nitai threw away both. He was on the point of throwing away the last one too when he decided against it. His knife had grown a little slippery. He wiped it on the grass and once again inserted the tip of the blade in the right place. The shell fell open and Nitai gasped in surprise.

Embedded in the moist, greyish white matter within was a small round object, about the size of a large pea. It wasn't white in colour and it wasn't silver but a bit of both and so beautiful that Nitai had never before seen anything like it. He took out the object, placed it on the palm of his hand and turned it around so it caught the light of the sun. And wonder filled Nitai's soul, for the little round object seemed to glow with a soft light, with here and there a hint of rainbow colours. "What is this?" thought Nitai in ecstasy. "What on earth is this gorgeous thing that I have found? And who can tell me something about it?"

At first he thought he'd take his find to his mother. Quietly, without telling the others. Maybe she would know. But he decided against it. His mother was too busy cooking and cleaning and attending to everybody's needs. Where would she find the time to sit with Nitai and talk? His father? Oh no. He would probably grab that beautiful object and throw it into the manure pit. He had done that to the gorgeous peacock feathers Nitai had picked up in the forest one day. His grandfather was losing his eyesight, anyway. He would not be able to appreciate the beauty of what Nitai had found.

For a long time Nitai sat on the edge of the pond and thought. And then

suddenly he made up his mind. He'd take his find to the master moshai. Hope rose in his heart. At the same time fear gnawed at him. His master moshai was full of knowledge. He would be able to tell what Nitai had found inside the shell. . . Oh yes, master moshai was a nice man. Kind, soft spoken. But sometimes he got angry too. Suppose he got angry with Nitai for not attending school? . . . For a long time Nitai sat there, torn with doubts. Then he looked at his find again and that decided him. He simply *had* to learn more about that shimmering round object. He *would* go to master moshai, and that was that.

It was early evening when Nitai reached master moshai's house. Master moshai sat across his threshold with a glass of tea in his hand. "Oh come, Nitai," he said. "Come and sit with me. What brings you here? Have you been home yet? Have you eaten?" Then, without waiting for an answer he called to his wife, "Bring another glass of tea and something to eat."

Master moshai waited till Nitai had taken two fistfuls of 'moori' (puffed rice), washing it down with sips of tea. Then he asked again, "Yes Nitai, perhaps now you can tell me what brings you here. We haven't seen you in school for a long time now."

From his shirt pocket Nitai took out the shell, opened it and laid it before master moshai. The little round object lay where Nitai had found it—embedded in the moist, greyish white matter within the shell. Master moshai gazed at it for a few minutes before he found his voice again. "Where did you find this?" he asked.

"In the village pond. Under water. It was clinging to the side of the pond."

"Amazing!" said master moshai. He went inside the house and came back with a magnifying glass. For a long time he examined the shell and its contents under the magnifying glass. "Amazing!" he said again. "Who would have dreamt of it?"

Suddenly Nitai's patience gave way. "What is it, master moshai?" he cried. "Please tell me quick."

Master moshai smiled. Patting Nitai on the head he said, "My son, I do believe that round object within the shell is a pearl. Not only is it beautiful to look at, it could be worth a lot of money."

"A pearl?" cried Nitai. "What on earth is a pearl?"

"Come with me and I'll tell you," said master moshai, rising to his feet and leading the way into the house. He opened a cupboard, took out a globe and placed it on a table near a window. The globe rolled in the light of the setting sun. "This is what our earth looks like," said master moshai. "Round like a ball. Did you know?"

Nitai shook his head.

Master moshai smiled. With one finger he traced the parts coloured blue. "These are the seas and the oceans, all full of water."

Nitai was listening but seemed a trifle restless. "But . . . what have the oceans of the world got to do with this thing that I have found?" he blurted out.

"Everything. Pearls have normally been found deep under the ocean."

"And how do people get them?" asked Nitai.

"They dive. Just as you dived today. They keep diving and bringing up these shells called oysters. Out of a hundred shells they bring, only 5 or 10 may have a pearl. So a lot of effort is wasted. You also got a pearl in only 1 out of 4 shells, isn't it? But your shells are fresh water mussels, not oysters. Sometimes pearls are also found in mussels, specially in China."

"I don't understand, master moshai," said Nitai. "How can a pearl form inside a shell?"

"An oyster or mussel is really a living animal and this greyish white is its flesh. A mussel lives in water. Sometimes a worm or grain of sand gets inside the oyster and causes a lot of irritation. The oyster can't throw it out. So, to make it smooth, the oyster covers it with layers of secretion. When the secretion hardens, it becomes a pearl."

Nitai was listening as in a daze. "Master moshai," he asked, "where did you learn all this?"

"From books, Nitai, from books," cried master moshai, suddenly very excited. "Books have so much to tell us.

I still have two cupboards full of books so I can read more and learn more. . ."

"Master moshai, you . . . you're still . . . learning?" said Nitai, his eyes wide open.

"I am. Learning is fun, Nitai," said master moshai. "The world is full of mysteries. . ."

Nitai took a deep breath. "Master moshai," he said, "may I please come to school from tomorrow? Will you teach me to read?"

Master moshai reached out and caught Nitai's hand. "I will."

"Will you teach me to read big books like the ones you have here?"

"I will, In time you'll learn to read each one of these books. . . If you work hard, that is."

"Oh, I'll work hard all right," said Nitai, jumping up. "Thank you, master moshai, thank you so much." And with that he dashed out of the hut. He ran all the way home to find his mother standing near the cowshed, lantern in hand, peering into the dark. Nitai ran and threw his arms around her. "Look what I found today. Open your hand." He put the pearl on her palm. She looked at it and her eyes opened wide with wonder. "Oh, it's beautiful!" she cried. "It's for you, Ma," said Nitai. "Get it made into a ring for yourself. Some day I'll tell you all about it." His mother smiled and patted him on the head. "Come on now," she said. "Your rice is waiting."

*Pratibha Nath is a writer of fiction for the young.*

## One World: A Collection of Writing for Young People

*One World* is a collection of writings for children, especially in the critical 12 to 15 years age group. It is the second in the theme-based collections series from Tulika Publishers; the first was *Sorry, Best Friend!* on the theme of communal harmony published in March 1997.

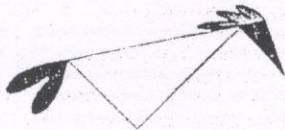
While the first book was a collection of short stories, *One World* has poetry, prose, reportage, fiction, memoir . . . thus taking the series a step further. The theme is explored in terms of science, the environment, remembered history, social document, sports, religion and social consciousness through 13 pieces of inspired and inspiring writing. Questions listed at the end of the book aim to make children/teachers/readers reflect, raise questions and debate the issues raised in each piece. The book offers excellent value education and, like *Sorry, Best Friend!* is ideal for inclusion in the school syllabus as supplementary reading.

The contributors are: Gita Mehta, Ashokamitran, Safdar Hashmi, Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi), Paul Zacharia, Raghavendra Rao, Shobhit Mahajan, Geetha Varadan, Prabhakar Rao, V. Ramnarayan, Poile Sengupta, Nitin Madhav and Sandhya Rao. The book is edited by Radhika Menon and Sandhya Rao.

*A very special book brought to you by  
The Book Review Trust, New Delhi and  
Tulika Publishers, Chennai*

## Science is Fun

Shobhit Mahajan



PLAY AND FIND OUT ABOUT SCIENCE: EASY EXPERIMENTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

By Janice VanCleave

John Wiley and Sons, 1996, pp. 122, \$12.95

GUIDE TO THE BEST SCIENCE FAIR PROJECTS

By Janice VanCleave

John Wiley and Sons, 1997, pp. 156, \$14.95

WHAT IF? MIND BOGGLING SCIENCE QUESTIONS FOR KIDS

By Robert Ehrlich

John Wiley and Sons, 1998, pp. 178, \$12.95

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY INCREDIBLE EARTH: A BOOK OF ANSWERS FOR KIDS

By Ann-Jeanette Campbell and Ronald Rood

John Wiley and Sons, 1996, pp. 186, \$12.95

One of the crucial differences between the environment in which today's children and those growing up even half a generation ago is the ubiquity of technology. From satellite television to multimedia computers, from laser discs to video games, the child today is completely swamped with high technology, a state of affairs which was inconceivable even a decade ago. But ironically, even with all this technology, it is not at all clear that the aptitude for science in children is increasing. In fact, all trends are to the contrary. What we are witnessing is an enormous increase in available information on tap but not necessarily in scientific aptitude. In fact, it can be argued that all these technologies are promoting a passive approach to learning science and are hence in the long run do more harm than good.

Among the various factors responsible for children turning away from science is the abominable quality of science resource material. While it is true that the text books are of poor quality, the teaching of science in even the so called progressive schools leaves much to be desired. The stress is on rote learning and the children are swamped with facts. They are not encouraged to ask questions about their surroundings and there is nothing in the curriculum which encourages creativity and a spirit of inquiry. The net result is the slow attrition of the natural curiosity in the child and the equating of science with a bunch of facts and formulae which need to be memorized. The true

joy of exploration and learning by doing is lost.

Janice VanCleave's books provide a very refreshing antidote to this malaise. *Play and Find Out about Science* is meant for 4-7 year olds and is a collection of easy experiments on a variety of topics like light, sound, electricity etc. The experiments are easy to perform and yet are very instructive. Each experiment starts as a question like "why do boats float" or "what makes a rainbow" and then seeks to find out by conducting a simple experiment. The materials mentioned in the book are easily available around the house and are safe to use for children. Each of them elucidates a key concept like gravity, refraction of light, flow of current etc. It is a wonderful book which all 5 year olds will enjoy and in the process learn important concepts about how nature works. For the parents, the book has a concise explanation of the various principles and a useful glos-

sary of the terms used.

Her other book about Science Projects is a bit more advanced. It gives complete descriptions of projects on about 50 topics in science. The topics cover areas like physics, chemistry, engineering and biology. The projects are easy to perform and once again clearly illustrate an important concept in the relevant areas. Each experiment starts once again as a question and then investigates it by an experiment. Besides the very lucid step-by-step instructions, there are very useful hints on do's and don'ts and also guiding rules for displaying the projects. There are also explanations provided for each investigation and a suggestion for further inquiry. The choice of projects is excellent and the presentation is very clear. There is a very useful bibliography and a glossary in the end. This book should be very useful for the precocious pre-teenager or even a slightly older child. One just hopes that it is not used as another guide book by beleaguered parents who need to do their children's holiday homework on science but is used by the kids themselves to explore exciting areas of science.

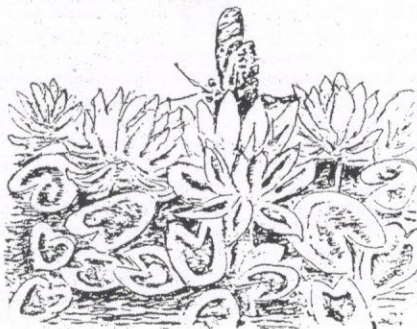
One of the most enjoyable as well as irritating things about a child is the constant barrage of questions that one has to face. What if there was no gravity on earth? What if we went to live on Pluto? What if I dug a hole through the earth and so on. This extraordinary curiosity is what distinguishes a child from an adult. The adult is for the most part hesitant to display ignorance while a child has no qualms about asking the most outlandish questions. Robert Ehrlich's book is excellent for such a curious child. Written for ages 8-12, the book is structured as answers to "what if" questions. Each question is answered by a simple statement, followed by a longer explanation of the science behind the answer. There are boxes which provide hints for experiments that can be performed, fun facts and trivia and most importantly other interesting questions that one can ask about the topic. As the author says in the introduction, "[Science] is a way of learning

about our world by asking questions, doing experiments and seeing what happens. The author is a professor of Physics and has written several well known popular science books like *The Cosmological Milkshake* and *Why Toast Lands Jelly Side Down*. The book should be an ideal companion for a growing child and will nurture the natural curiosity in her.

The New York Public Library is one of the largest and best run public library systems in the US. It also brings out a series of reference books, like the New York Public Library Desk Reference which are fairly popular. The book *Incredible Earth* is one of the New York Public Library Series and deals with Earth Sciences. "How was the earth formed?" "When did life begin?" "Why did dinosaurs become extinct?" These are the kinds of questions which are answered in this fascinating book. The book is a mine of information about topics related to our earth. Once again, the book contains answers to questions which are commonly asked by kids about our planet. The answers given are very clear and can be easily followed by an average middle school child. The answers are supplemented by boxes which contain additional information and several interesting facts. For instance, pumice, the highly porous, feather light rock is actually a volcanic rock and is one of the ingredients in toothpaste! Or that typhoon is a mispronunciation of the Chinese word ta-feng which means violent winds. The book is very well produced and has an excellent glossary and a bibliography for interested readers.

The paucity of good science books, both text books and reference material in India is one of the main reasons of the decline in interest in science among the school children. Though many of them may take up science as a subject in their high school, it is mostly because it is prerequisite to obtain admission in professional colleges and not because of any inherent interest in the subject. This thesis is borne out by the fact that the enrollment in undergraduate science courses is falling drastically. If one could make learning of science fun, it is possible that more students will go in for science out of choice rather than compulsion. To make the learning of science a creative activity which is essentially an exploration, we need more books like these together with teachers who can enthuse the students to be inquisitive and courageous to speculate.

Shobhit Mahajan teaches in the Department of Physics & Astrophysics, University of Delhi.



## Under the Apple Logo

C. Uday Bhaskar

NELSON MANDELA: NO EASY WALK TO FREEDOM

By Barry Deneberg

1991, reprint 1995, pp.178,

I HAVE A DREAM: THE STORY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

By Margaret Davidson

1986, pp.127,

TITANIC CROSSING

By Barbara Williams

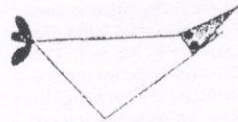
1995, pp.167, Rs.90.00

THE MUSIC OF DOLPHINS

By Karen Hesse

1996, pp.

All from Scholastic, New York



Books for children is reasonably big business in the USA and the competition with other forms of learning and entertainment is more intense there than it is here in India. One cannot recall any one publishing house having found a niche in this part of the world and the four books under review have all been published by Scholastic Inc. which operates out of New York, Toronto, London, Auckland and Sydney—in other words a bigish swathe of the English reading world of children. The publishers appear to have a popular biography series and another one of fiction that goes under the apple logo—well before the fruit became synonymous with the computer revolution! Interestingly, two of the four books dwell on well known figures in this century—the late Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela—who individually contributed in no small measure to end racial discrimination in their own times and thereby became legends. Mr. Nelson Mandela—now the grand old man of South Africa, like other tall men in history who preceded him, epitomizes the spirit of perseverance and conviction against overwhelming odds and his success in bringing the shameful practice of apartheid to an end has a special resonance for all Indians. Apartheid means ‘separateness’ in the Afrikaans language, and this distinction based on race and colour was adopted as a formal policy by the all white South African government in 1948. This deplorable practice, fiercely resisted by the black population of the country was finally dismantled when Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa’s President in April

1994. Deneberg’s biography is comprehensive and provides a very readable account of Mandela’s odyssey which included 26 lonely years in prison under very harsh conditions. The book traces the saga from the birth of the infant Rolihlahla to a tribal chief in 1918 in the Transkei region of South Africa to the evolution into young Nelson (the name he assumed) who became a lawyer and finally the transformation into Mandela—a symbol of hope for the oppressed black people of Africa in later decades. India under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was in the vanguard of condemning the practice of apartheid when it was tacitly ignored by the rest of the world and it is apt that the famous Mandela phrase that there is “No Easy Walk to Freedom” was taken from a speech of Nehru.

The Martin Luther King biography is relatively smaller with bigger type-face but is in keeping with the biography template. Here again was a leader who changed the course of American history by sheer dint of courage and conviction and the indignity of being a black person in the American South in the 1930’s when the young Martin was growing up is vividly captured in small vignettes by Davidson. Martin Luther King was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi in his advocacy of non-violence for black Americans in their war to end racial segregation and one of the illustrations in the book shows an earnest young man poring over a Gandhi reader with a Bible next to him—a poignant juxtaposition for two great human beings. Davidson introduces a pace and urgency in the King narrative that is commendable and the fact that the

Nobel Prize for peace was awarded to King in 1964 when he was a mere 35 years old, the youngest recipient of the coveted prize, is ample testimony to his triumph—though he ultimately died to the bullet of an assassin in 1968. These books may have been published in the USA but they are meant for children the world over and to that extent if there is one suggestion, it would be to make the narrative more “child-friendly” by embellishing such biographies with more detail of such great men as little boys. It may call for more research than is available in standard biographies and perhaps some imagination. And in the same vein, more illustrations—as opposed to news photographs—may have an added appeal to the younger cross-section.

The other two books under the apple insignia are fictional to an extent, in that the Titanic tale is based on the actual events of 1912, while the story of the child brought up by the dolphins is in the Mowgli genre but with mixed results. The Titanic story, it must be noted, was written before the film caught the public imagination last year and Williams weaves her story with dexterity. The sinking of the ship is told through the perspective of a young boy Albert Trask and it is an engrossing tale—though it is familiar and has been dealt with many times. This is where Williams scores and in her post-script she refers to a single real-life incident of the Titanic giving her the ‘spark’ of a

young thirteen year old boy being prevented from entering one of the life-boats since he was considered to be a man. This is a tidy tale and should find its way to many kids—but it is a pity that there is not a single illustration in what is deemed a children’s book. What does Albert look like—is a question that every child would like answered through image. Maybe a reprint can redress this lacuna.

The last book is a take-off on a familiar theme—children brought up in the wild by animals. While Mowgli, the wolf-child of Kipling fame is well-known and is now immortalized on screen in scores of languages, this time it is a child reared by dolphins. Mila is a strange child found by the US Coast Guard and brought to civilization with not too happy results. I am afraid the book falls between stools and while there are sections that engage, on the whole it fails to hold—though one may have lost the innocence that a less sullied sensibility may bring to bear. The price of these books in rupees is indicated only on one volume—the Titanic tale—which at Rs.90 is within the affordable range, when some kids can afford to buy a pair of Nike shoes at Rs.4,000 to Rs.5,000. If these books do come to the subcontinent, translations into Indian languages ought to be considered.

C. Uday Bhaskar is keenly interested in children’s literature.



## Dr. Richard Bamberger: Giving a new lease of life to fairy tales

Swapna Datta

When a scholarship from the International Institute of Children’s Literature and Reading Research, Vienna, came my way this August, I decided to make a study of Austrian folk and fairy tales.

I soon realized that Austria was remarkably rich in fairy tales. So much so, that there were several volumes of folklore about each and every part of Austria. They were beautifully produced, attractively illustrated and most popular with children. I also learnt that like the brothers Grimm in Germany, most of these tales and legends had been painstakingly collected and retold by a famous scholar—Dr. Richard

Bamberger, founder President of IBBY and Secretary General of the Austrian Young People’s Book Club. Most of the fairy tale collections I found in the Institute library were written by him.

Dr. Bamberger writes in German but his work has been translated into all major European and several Asian languages. I was thrilled to learn that he lived in Vienna and promptly asked for an appointment. His secretary sent me a fax saying I could meet him the next week. I spent the whole week reading his books. What he thought of fairy tales was obvious. No child ought to grow up without fairy tales. The fairy tale is filled with a wealth of magical

vistas and with the innocence of the child's soul' he states in the introduction, 'It is the first faint gleam of poetry to touch the growing sensibility of the child'. Like the Grimm Brothers, he too feels that 'Fairy tales are told so that the child's earliest thoughts and emotions may awaken and flourish in their pure and gentle light'

Dr. Richard Bamberger was born in 1911 in Meddling in Tal, a small village in Lower Austria. After qualifying from the Training College for Teachers at Krems he studied German and English at the University of Wien and taught Germanic languages and English for many years. He had also been the founder and head of 'Buchklub der Jugend', and President, International Institute for Children's Literature and Reading Research. He now heads the Institute of Textbook Research and Promotion of Learning which he founded in 1981. I asked him several questions about fairy tales and their importance and taped his answers. Here are some of them, in his own words.

Why does he consider the fairy tale so important?

The hero of the fairy tale is a simplified image of a man on his journey through life, a journey which inevitably leads him through darkness and difficulty. But on the way the hero battles against the powers of evil and returns victorious to the world of goodness and light. In this way the fairy tale increases the child's confidence in his own strength and he knows that he can overcome evil.'

Do modern thinkers agree with him?

'Most modern psychologists are of the opinion that fear and horror are a part of life itself. In the fairy tale the child not only experiences this fear but also learns how to overcome it. We stand in the middle of life and we know that every situation has two sides to it. Where there is light there is inevitably deep shadow. The truth often lies between the two.'

Was that the reason he wrote so many collections of fairy tales?

'Yes. The family circle is often less close nowadays than it was in the past. Fairy tale is no longer transmitted orally from generation to generation. Hence the fairy tale collections! The folk tale remains the magic key to a power of inner experience and imagination which determines man's relation to the world and his fellow men and to contemporary and eternal values. It is for this reason that books of folk tales and fairy tales ought to form the basis of every child's library. If he can learn to take delight in them and to look after them carefully they will indeed become a signpost to the wider world of literature in later life and the enduring

foundation of a lifelong love of good books'.

With *My First Big Storybook* Dr Richard Bamberger of Austria brought to the youngest children a new collection of stories from many different lands. This volume was placed on the Honours List for the Austrian State Prize. *My First Big Storybook* contains 73 folk and fairy tales. *My Second Big Storybook* has 49 stories and *My Third Big Storybook* has 18 stories. All of them are extremely popular not only in Austria but all over the world.

Had he graded the books deliberately?

'Yes' assented Dr. Bamberger, 'A child derives more pleasure from books if they are properly suited to his age. That is why I have offered a varied selection of stories from all over the world, sorted into three different steps or age groups.' The stories in the first book are from many different lands. Some are old favourites such as *The fox and the stork* and *Rumpelstiltskin*. The second volume includes stories from varied and exotic sources and offers a wealth of magic and poetry. The third consists mainly of less known fairy tales from far away countries such as Norway and the Asian countries. They also include popular tales from Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde.

The longer tales have another greater gift to offer—they have many of the qualities of true poetry and great literature and will lead you on into the wide and fascinating realm of books which is eagerly sought by everyone who wants more from life than a dull, practical, day-to-day existence' says Dr. Bamberger in the introduction of these three volumes, 'I should like to think that a great many of you will find your way into this wonderful magic realm which exists not merely in dreams and imagination but between the two covers of a book.'

Dr. Bamberger did something else which is equally important. He founded the Book club for Young People in Vienna. He took special care improving the yearbooks which were extensively read at the Book Club. Before long the club had over 8,50,000 members. Hence all important publishers tried to have extracts of their new books included in the yearbooks before actually printing them. Manuscripts which were not approved by the Book Club were rejected by the publishers too. This had a tremendous influence on the development of Austrian children's literature.

The Book Club was further promoted when Dr. Bamberger wrote over 20 books and presented 500 papers on the importance of reading and gave more than 3000 lectures on the subject all

over Austria. He founded and edited a yearbook for teachers called *Barke* which included articles on children's books, the importance of reading, readability and text difficulty and textbook research. It comprised over 500 pages. He was also the founder editor of the magazines *Jugend und Buch*, *Bookbird* and the newsletters of the *Buchklub*. He went on extensive lecture tours in Germany, USA, England, Ireland, Israel and Eastern Asia, winning many Decorations, Honours and trophies for his contribution to children's literature.

Did he have a message for the writ-

ers of today, I asked before leaving.

'Remember, you must set a good example yourself. Lay aside the latest glossy magazine and let your child see you absorbed in your book. Sad indeed is the home where the family cannot gather quietly round the fire with their books. They do not know what they are missing.'

*Swarna Datta has been writing and translating books for children for two decades and has around 24 titles to her credit.*



## A Bengali Flavour

Bulbul Sharma

FOUR HEROES & A HAUNTED HOUSE

By Narayan Gangopadhyay

Tara Publishing, Chennai, 1998, pp. 114, Rs. 80.00

Children's writing in Bengali has always been innovative, humorous and so readable that even adults love reading these books. Many well known writers of Bengal have written stories for children and besides formidable names like Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Roy, Satyajit Ray there are many other popular writers who have created delightful stories for children which range from detective fiction, historical tales, adventure and ghost stories. *Four Heroes and a Haunted House* is a ghost story with a difference which its author has crafted in an unusual style. Witty, whimsical and full of funny situations, this adventure story written by the well known Bengali writer Narayan Gangopadhyay is a story both children and adults will love to read. Translated from Bengali by Swati Bhattacharjee *four Heroes and A Haunted House* has all the ingredients needed to make a good yarn for children. Tenida, a popular character in Bengali children's literature is here along with his friends each one a faint hearted hero with voracious appetites. Though all they want is 'luchi' with mutton curry' and a comfortable bed to sleep in, the four heroes are plunged into a series of wild adventures with ghosts who smoke 'bidis' and men who look like giants from fairy tales. 'Gajeshwar gave us a look. The

very sight of his eyes turned our blood to water. Beside Gajeshwar, even the huge Swami looked like a stick. His complexion was soot-black, his size like an elephant, his head shaved with only a 'shikha' hanging from the middle of it. Gajeshwar looked at us with his tiny eyes and said, "Boys are like that these days Prabhu, like apes from Kishkindha. Would Prabhuji like me to box their ears, one by one"? If Gajeshwar boxed our ears they will surely come off in his hands. The four of us were terrified, and huddled together like jalebis'. The not-so-brave heroes run around the jungles of Jhanto Hills, chased by villains named Gachang Fu—a ferocious Chinese bandit and Swami Ghutghutananda, a sadhu with a weakness for 'rasogulla' but the boys are always saved in the nick of time as their enemies either skid on banana skins or get stung by helpful scorpions. Funny, whimsical and written in a friendly effortless style, this adventure story for children has real conversations, real food and real ghosts and will amuse and entertain every child and adult who reads it.

*Bulbul Sharma is a writer and artist. She has published three collections of short stories and works as an art teacher for disabled children.*

## New from Oxford

### Indian Food: A Historical Companion

K.T. Achaya's books include *The Food Industries of British India* (OUP, 1994) and *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food* (forthcoming from OUP).

- exhaustive and lucid
- winner of the Premio Langhe Cerreto
- well illustrated

This Companion outlines the enormous variety of cuisines, food materials and dishes that collectively fall under the term 'Indian food'.

Drawing upon material from a variety of sources—literature, archaeology, epigraphic records, anthropology, philology, and botanical and genetic studies—the book chronologically details the history of Indian food, beginning with prehistoric times and ending with British rule. Extensively revised since its first publication in 1994, this rich storehouse of fascinating information on Indian food will interest food aficionados, historians, anthropologists and general readers.

'Achaya has done a commendable job of a daunting task, namely, writing the history of Indian food from the earliest, almost prehistoric days, to the present time.

— *India Today*

0 19 564416 6 1998 (OIP) 280 x 220 mm 338 pp. Rs 395 IP



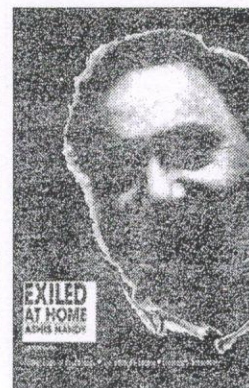
### Exiled at Home

Comprising *At the Edge of Psychology*; *The Intimate Enemy*; *Creating a Nationality*

Ashis Nandy is a distinguished political psychologist, sociologist of science, and futurist. These respected books on culture, politics and systems of knowledge have had a wide readership and are available here for the first time within a single volume. This edition also includes an Introduction written by D.R. Nagaraj.

*At the Edge of Psychology* examines the links between mind, politics and culture in India, especially the continuities and breaks in the culture of Indian politics and the sources of violence in public life. *The Intimate Enemy* is a study of the cultural psychology of colonialism. It explores the sources of creative politics and resistance to western colonialism in British India. *Creating a Nationality* narrates, mainly through the experiences of the inhabitants of Ayodhya, the movement culminating in the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Built into the narrative is an analysis of the culture of communal conflict, the nature of organized mass violence, and the political psychology of Hindu nationalism.

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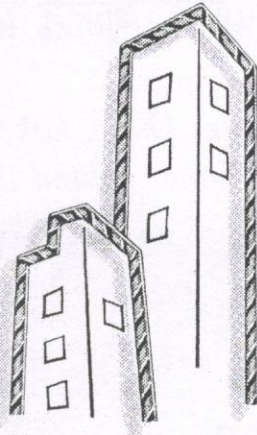


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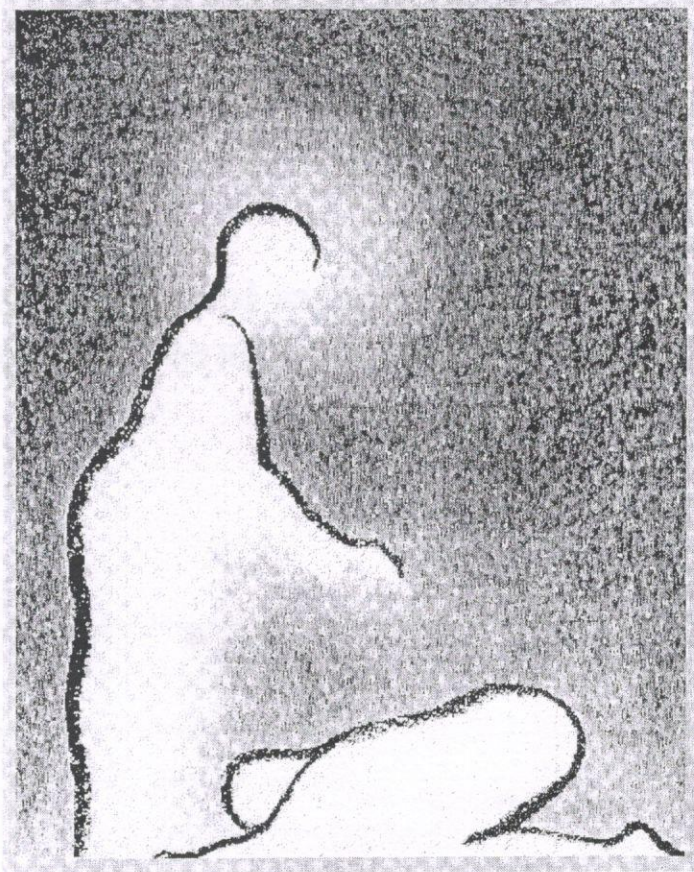


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