THE BOOK REVIEW

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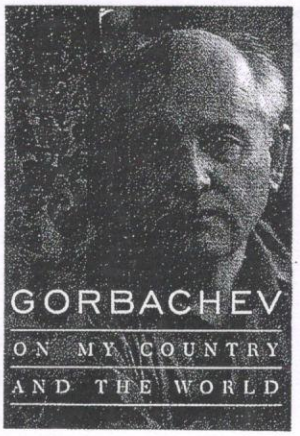
Soviet Disintegration: Two Perspectives

Hari Vasudevan



M.S. GORBACHEV: ON MY COUNTRY AND THE WORLD
Translated by George Shriver
Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 300, £ 19.00

SUBVERSIVE INSTITUTIONS
By Valerie Bunce
Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 206, £ 12.95

In the decade following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, political perspectives on the events of 1991 have attracted two types of writer. Of the books under review, M.S. Gorbachev's memoir-cum-analysis follows the path of the memoirists who have presented a tailored version of their experience of the gradual drift into internal discord during the perestroika, and the central events that followed in 1991: the putsch of August 1991, the agreement at Minsk (December 8th) and the final disintegration (confirmed by the Alma Ata conference of 21st December) and Gorbachev's resignation as President on Christmas Day. The "autobiographies" of Boris Yeltsin, Ruslan Khasbulatov (former Russian Supreme Soviet Speaker) Andrei Kozyrev (former Foreign Minister), and some of the writing of Gorbachev himself, have been of this type. They are neatly blurred on some points, bear in mind the necessity for the dramatic touch, and are invariably self-serving and self-congratulatory. This literature, where requirements determine memory, is balanced by a second genre: the scholarly work, struggling against the odds of confidentiality, which seeks an explanation of what happened, bearing a long term perspective in mind. Exemplary work of a chronicle-type has been done in this mould by John Dunlop. Steven Fish, Michael McFaul and others have oriented themselves less to detail and more to the analytical instruments of American political science. This is the case with Valerie Bunce, distinguished Cornell University specialist on Eastern Europe, whose book is discussed here along with Gorbachev's. Such analytical literature lacks a sense of coincidence and personal detail: but it rises above the vendetta-perspective which is the stock in trade of the seasoned politician.

To be fair to M.S. Gorbachev, his writing does not degenerate to the depths to which memoirist-raving has often descended. It is not an attempt to settle scores against the backdrop of the disintegration drama, though, mortal as he is, the ex-Soviet President cannot help the odd dig at his successor in the Kremlin. The book is an update on his own earlier writing on what was to be done in the Soviet Union and the World (*Perestroika. New Political Thinking for My Country and the World* [1987]), and, as such, it is not specifically focused on the end of the USSR. The main concern is to advance a programme for global revitalization, with an eye to the CIS. The former General Secretary of the CPSU, however, is an unredeemed apparatchik and an admirer of the October Revolution. He is of the opinion that the arrival and departure of the Soviet state in world affairs has been fundamental to where the world is going; that a sense of the future needs to be placed against the backdrop of what went wrong with the USSR, and how the country came to an end. The disintegration drama, therefore, plays a pivotal role in his presentation, and, since the end of the USSR is part of his own life-story, the analysis drifts into memoir. What happened is "tragic", not only for Russia, but because it taught the lesson that the West had won the Cold War—not the lesson that Gorbachev's "new thinking" (which was not capitalism), had changed Russia, and was the path of salvation for the world.

The narrative of the disintegration, though, is the interesting bit of the book. It is prefaced by seven chapters of commentary on the history of the Soviet state, replete with banal insights not worth serious attention, other than to indicate Gorbachev's mind-set. These include "The October revolution undeniably reflected the most urgent demands of the broadest strata of the population for fundamental social change", which indicate a clairvoyance which historians have failed to acquire. Gorbachev dwells on the welfare achievements of the October regime (which no one has denied). He compares Collectivization to the English enclosure movement (which shows a disdain for the costs of mass starvation) and speaks of the revolution's "civilizing role in the vast expanses of Asia and South East Europe". Here, he subtly (!) distinguishes between the "social change" that was required by the white civilization of the Russian squire and his peasant and the "civilization" that was required by the brown barbarism of the traders of the Central Asian Khanates and their emirs. The reader is also required to remember that the Revolution was responsible for the downfall of Empires and Imperialism in their worst form (not necessary for most readers in the colonial world); that capitalism and the market have offered no solutions to world problems and that there is still something to be said for socialist thinking. Gorbachev concedes that "totalitarianism" was the weakness of Soviet power: though, since he also argues the vitality of Soviet society at times under Stalin's rule, it is not clear what this "totalitarianism" was all about. He is clear and uncategorical though, that the "totalitarianism" (i.e. not "the country", but "the system") was responsible for the dormant tension between nationalities that erupted when he began perestroika (c.1987).

It was from here that the "tragedy" of the disintegration took off. Gorbachev is again clear in his mind that (as the referendum of March 1991 indicated), the majority of the Soviet population (except in the Baltic) did not want disintegration. The incidents of civil disturbance in Armenia, Georgia and Central Asia in 1990-91 are not, he is clear, evidence of the unworkability of the Union. The reason for the events of December 1991, hence, lie in the failure to find terms for a new Soviet state in mid and late 1991 during the Novo-Ogarevo negotiations (i.e. discussions that took place at Novo-Ogarevo between Soviet leaders), which Gorbachev ran. The Yanaev putsch (19th-21st August 1991) which was responsible for the collapse of Communist authority, is given short shrift. Rather, the memoir drifts into a discussion of the ambience that followed: into an excellent account of mood, and lack of determination, with each Soviet leader clinging on to his local popularity, and various lobbies pressing their cause. The Ukrainian leader, Kravchuk, comes off badly for his failure to put the compromise Union agreement of November 1991 to his parliament. Coming off bad also is the Democratic Russia movement whose leaders are accused of patent chauvinism for their sentiments that:

> "The elimination of the old centre inevitably brings to the fore objective conflicts between the interests of Russia and those of the other republics. For the latter the preservation of the existing flow of resources and financial-economic relations during the transition period signifies a unique opportunity to

reconstruct their economies at Russia's expense....Objectively Russia does not need an economic Centre....."

Dialogues from USSR State Council records of November are used by Gorbachev to defend his position that nobody was keen on disintegration, yet changed their minds repeatedly. This is Gorbachev's main accusation against Yeltsin—at times agreeing to a Union, at times challenging the notion of a single state entity: "You could talk with him and reach an agreement about something, but the next day, he would do just the opposite".

The meeting at Minsk on December 8th, between Shushkevich (President of Belorussia), Kravchuk (President of the Ukraine) and Yeltsin (President of Russia), and the creation of the Slavic Commonwealth at that meeting is a sudden leap in the dark in such circumstances: a hopeless and thoughtless gamble by satraps who had no idea of what they were doing. They quickly persuaded their parliaments that this was the best course: the Belorussian and Ukrainian soviets ratified the treaty on 10th December, the Russian on the 12th and the Commonwealth was extended to make the CIS after Central Asian leaders meet with other leaders of the USSR at Almaty on 21st December. There was no room left for Gorbachev's idea of "a single state entity", and the Union, hence, de facto stood dissolved. Gorbachev himself resigned as President on 25th December 1991. According to Gorbachev, the regrets came quickly thereafter, but it was too late, and the future course for the region can only be set correctly when some form of Union is decided again.

The conclusion leads Gorbachev into another round of general pontification. He initially justifies his policies to let Eastern Europe go in 1989, and to allow German Unification, showing that this was a concession to popular sentiment in this region. Such respect for democratic preference, he argues was the cornerstone of his "new thinking" and continues to be. It is on this basis that he argues for mixed economy approaches to contemporary problems and deplores the tendency to think about security independent of public approval and social welfare. There are twelve chapters of this (albeit short), where the author points out the limitation of every part of the world: the West's democracy is imperfect; Russia's democracy is not based on developed civil society etc. etc. The generalizations are flaccid: the author has lost track of a story he knows. He speaks without empathy, experience and conviction: a prisoner of the cold mansion of the Gorbachev Fund in Moscow. Attempting to go beyond the memoir, Gorbachev leaves a diatribe which lacks sparkle.

It requires cold logic and analysis like Valerie Bunce's to restore some perspective. There are no frills here: merely stark, solid definitions of what is a revolution, what is a rebellion, what is elite rule in a communist state, and why disintegration took place in the way it did, not only in the USSR but also in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The focus is tight: it rests on the states mentioned. Bunce is not trying to understand the problems of the world yesterday and today, linking them to Soviet collapse. She is concerned with why Eastern European socialism collapsed and why three states fell to pieces. Her "sample" for analysis is indisputable, since all the societies shared common traits and experiences. Her canvas is textured and large. She initiates a reflection on the lessons of 1989-1991, without attracting a quarrel that she is comparing incomparables.

In the case of the USSR, Bunce's forceful analysis addresses the question that Gorbachev and almost all memoirists mention only to neglect: i.e. why "totalitarian" socialism led to disintegration. She refuses to lay this at the door of nationalism long suppressed but powerful, even if she admits that nationalism, both primordial and constructed, existed in some form in the USSR. Disintegration for her, as for Gorbachev, came from the collapse of the state: a consequence of more than the coincidences and political machinations of four months in 1991. She attributes it to the character of socialist institutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the breakdown of those institutions. The disintegration of the state along national lines is linked to the bureaucratic organization of the countries concerned according to national lines, even if nationalism played small role in the working of the units (or "republics" in the Soviet and Yugoslav cases). This is an echo of the position taken by Jaques Sapir, the French Sovietologist and economist.

Like Gorbachev, Bunce traces the origins of all things in the very nature of the October regime, which she classifies as a party dictatorship of an exceptional kind, where there was an extraordinary level of fusion between the Communist Party, the socialist economy and the state. Here, it is clear to trace a "party", a "state" and a "public", and, at no time, according to Bunce, does this monolith give way to something like "government" as it figures in pluralist societies. The extent of the state's penetration into the course of everyday life was, Bunce considers, unusual and incomparable. The dispensation that prevailed was shot through with commitment to economic modernization, which became a crucial consideration in relations within the Party and within the state as it was nowhere else. Along with such commitment, however, also went an awareness among the public of redistributive ideals. The very constitution of structures of this kind, moreover, gave the public a cohesion it lacked elsewhere; and the state-society dichotomy gave to that public an equality and unity of experience which is lacking in non-socialist societies. Finally, the state being what it was, it made no allowance for what the public would do when the Party itself and the state went into crisis. The upshot was that there was a domain of activity left to the public in moments when the Party-state complex went into crisis. Public quiescence and extraordinary public activity went hand in hand. Hence the periodic occurrence of mass strikes and demonstrations, and later lapse into quiet bumbling. The picture pithily accommodates all we know of socialism in Eastern Europe: it is oppressive, yet liberating, revolutionary and redistributive, yet elitist. At one go, Bunce frees herself of the disputes about whether the Soviet Union was "ruled" or "governed" (the motif of most debates about Soviet politics in the United States and Britain during the 70s and 80s).

Bunce is adamant that the competition in the Party-state complex was extraordinary and conflicts at various levels were closely interlinked (in the post-war years especially). This was seen at succession struggles, when more was at stake than in any other political systems, and where economic performance and social policy was repeatedly brought into the picture. Political change in pluralist societies, by Bunce's perspective, does not have the same implications that it did in the case of Eastern European socialism. She also grants that a degree of self-expression and dissent was inbuilt into this system after the Khruschev era, partly as a result of the competitiveness of the elite: i.e. it functioned to "deregulate the party's monopoly". This also was to "undermine economic growth" since traditionally such growth was premised on the disciplined working of the Party-state monolith to the Stalinist diktat. According to Bunce, an "involuntary subversion" of socialism thus took place:

"Key to this process of the involuntary subversion of socialism was the role of socialist institutions in generating high level of intra-elite conflict along horizontal and vertical lines. This occurred in large measure because these systems combined the following characteristics: a stress on planned and possible to distinguish rapid transformation; high rates of turnover in elite positions (especially in the early years of socialism, when the old system was destroyed and the new system imposed); overlapping and poorly specified administrative responsibilities attached to elite positions; pooled economic, political and social resources, and, thus, interdependent and highly fluctuating outcomes; close interdependence between the upper and lower reaches of the party, because the former needed the latter to procure resources and meet planned objectives, while the latter depended upon the former for allocation of resources and for security of job and life; and the role of the party not just as the sole distributor of power and privilege but also as the sole market for any and all claims to power and privilege".

In federal states such as the Soviet Union, this situation was rendered more complex by acceptance of the significance of nationalism. This:

> "...complicated considerably the smooth functioning of two-tiered socialism, because it produced not one party and one society, but many—and managed, given the tendencies of socialism in general and the institutional elaboration of diversity at the republican level, to homogenize these national parties and these national societies".

Such a phenomenon was true for the whole Soviet bloc, which was a monolith, where party economy and state were thoroughly integrated, but was shot through with intra-elite conflict, focusing often on national divisions which occasionally did and occasionally did not have a validity.

With such a perspective, Bunce unravels the economic crisis that led to dispute within the CPSU in the perestroika period, and the elite conflict that perestroika reflected and engendered. She links the general potential for bloc disintegration to détente which had already brought to an end the siege mentality which had prevailed in the bloc. The outcomes sent shock waves through Eastern Europe, affecting the federal states in an unusual manner because of their national-republican structures. Elites mobilized against each other everywhere. Gorbachev was the key to the process, although the "transition" followed in various ways: pacting in Hungary and Poland, violent in Romania etc. The peaceful-cum-violent character of Soviet collapse is linked to Gorbachev and the peculiar quality of Soviet nationalism respectively. The passivity of the army is directly associated with its transnational mission—which made it incapable of involving itself in internecine struggles.

Bunce's vision is logically tight and cartesian in its perfection. It leaves no room for the coincidences that Gorbachev speaks of : the hopes and uncertainties that haunted the autumn of 1991 when the dream-world of millions, Soviet and non-Soviet, gradually shattered. In fact, *Subversive Institutions* begs the question why Soviet demise could not be postponed, because of these very hopes and uncertainties. If the mind-set revealed by the Gorbachev memoir was still prevalent among persons in positions of authority—commanding loyalty and respect—why not a more drawn-out process. There is no real room in Bunce's relentless analysis for the answer. It must be sought in the self-serving memoirs and Gorbachev's trail of coincidences with which we began. The Soviet Union might have been ripe for going—like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. But a choice had to be made: and ultimately, books like Gorbachev's are the best to tell us how those choices were made, and with what assumptions.■

Hari Vasudevan, Professor at the Department of History, Calcutta University, has jointly edited with Purabi Roy and S.L. Dutta Gupta *Indo-Soviet Relations 1917-47: Select Documents from the Russian Archives.*

Significance of the 'habitus' in New Central Asia

Suchandana Chatterjee

THE NEW CENTRAL ASIA: THE CREATION OF NATIONS
By Olivier Roy
I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, 2000, pp. 222, £ 14.95

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central Asian specialists with considerable fieldwork experience have been studying various aspects of 'transition' in the new independent Muslim states of the former Soviet Union. Scholarly debates and discussions have tended to revolve round themes e.g. the practice of religion, popular beliefs and rituals, historiography and 'new literature', 'nation building' and 'state formation', problems in environment, geopolitics and the new great game discourse, etc. The purpose of all these studies has been to explore whether the present period of 'transition' has in any way been different from the Soviet period. Scholars have also tried to compare the Soviet and the post-Soviet years by diagnosing past experiences of the Central Asians. Central Asia's multi-dimensional aspects have attracted wide attention in recent years. One such aspect is the study of Central Asia not as a geographical space, but as a cultural space with multiple identities. Olivier Roy's new book *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* attempts to explore several such identities in Central Asia.

Roy's book is fascinating because of two strong points. First, he approaches the local issues more carefully and intently than most other authors. Secondly, he is very sensitive about marginalized identities in Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan. His field work from 1990-1996 has enabled him to develop this argument further in his book. He has the ability to understand the working of local institutions far better.

Roy's argument is that in the newly independent states of Central Asia, institutions were home-grown and localized, buttressed and supported by Moscow. Politicians entered the corridors of power in their respective republics and climbed up the social ladder through networks and patron-client relationships. This had become a fairly established phenomenon in the Soviet period. It so happened that these networks and relationships depended a lot on socio-economic identities as clan, tribe, family, *mahalla* and *kolkhoz*. These networks were manipulated by 'solidarity groups' whose activities were not merely concentrated in a given territorial area but were also determined by several other factors which were the reasons behind the loyalty and allegiance of the members to a particular group. For instance, between 1990-94, in Lenin kolkhoz in Dushanbe, which is the capital of Tajikistan, there was not only a 'kolkhozian identity' represented by a 'collective' of peasants but also an identity borne out of fealty or allegiance by a group of families to the president of the kolkhoz who often behaved like a 'traditional notable' (pp. 89-91). The implication therefore is that the *kolkhozy* (collective farms) functioned as solidarity groups under the management of their presidents who wielded significant power and prestige not as *apparatchik* but as locally influential "notables" who always originated from within the district in which the *kolkhoz* was situated (p.92). In the Central Asian countryside, where local power was so crucial, it was politically important not to be a Soviet functionary or a bureaucrat but to be a republican functionary who depended on both economic and social networks for political survival. He had to establish himself within his community first. Recognition by his community automatically transformed him into an economic agent of the Soviet state and led him to serve the state as the *kolkhoz* president. Their significance as prominent personalities who wielded a lot of prestige in state-promoted institutions of power e.g. academic institutions like the Academy of Sciences, Writers' Union, etc. is something that must be taken note of. Their social prominence gave them recognition and triggered off sentiments that became the crucial reason behind factional squabbles in more recent times.

The artificiality of the mechanism for constructing a Soviet state became evident in the process that territorially, linguistically and administratively divided the peoples of Central Asia. Roy is sympathetic to the Tajiks who were victimized by the Soviets' nation-forming strategy that worked on the basis of a 'deculturation' (p. 121). The Tajiks lost their historic cities Bukhara and Samarkand to Uzbekistan due to the Soviets' territorial delimitation policy. Their culture was regarded as a part of a rich Persian culture. Their literati, some of them belonging to the Pamiri community, were seldom recognized within elite Tajik politics and society. The differences between city Tajiks and mountain Tajiks were not taken into account. In the process, some were inducted into the local elite while others were marginalized and were identified as a category of people belonging to an autonomous

Tajik region (Pamir, Kurgan Teppe, Kulyab, Galcha), circumscribed by an overall Tajik identity. In the overall process of 'appropriation', the Tajiks were the worst affected.

The magnitude of the efforts of building a Soviet state became evident in the 'symbols' of Soviet nationhood. The image of a Soviet nation was conceived and constructed through symbols. The academia, curricula, institutions, media and billboards became part of that symbolism which represented a gargantuan Soviet apparatus. The author does not deny that such 'symbolism' became less attractive with the dawn of reforms during Andropov and Gorbachev regimes. Yet, it is undeniably true that such symbolism became the instrument for legitimizing Soviet rule.

In many ways the book is not characteristically too different from the genre of research that tends to attack the Soviets' construction of politically constructed notions. For example, to Roy, the notion of an ethnic group is characteristically too different from traditionally existent loyalties that have 'resurfaced' in recent times. Ethnic unity has been seriously tested over time, particularly in the last two decades of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the implication is that there are terms that have become thoroughly inapplicable in the present situation of conflict and cleavage.

The author's observations as a social scientist with adequate fieldwork experience are the asset of this book. He has a thorough understanding of the heterogeneities of this region that was spread over various periods of history. This is indicated by his expression 'levels' of identity which are defined according to region, ancestry (tribal in the case of nomads and sedentary in the case of the settlers in the oases). In the pre-Soviet period, for instance, community belonging was often determined by the collective responsibility of the community in paying taxes to the Khans and the Emirs and also enjoying the rights over land and water. The Soviets reconstituted these identities through the kolkhoz system. Today, these groupings have acquired greater significance with increasing emphasis on urban living, living patterns (households and *mahallas*). Similarly, there are identities that have been sustained through memory—as in the case of the tribal identity of the Barlas (as is the case of the Kazakhs) or the Lokais (as is the case of the Uzbeks).

The author's critique of 'nationalism' in Central Asia also demands attention. According to him, a single nationalist alternative never emerged in Central Asia in Soviet Union's 70-year history. Signs of discord among Turkic nationalists were evident as early as May 1917 during the convening of the first All Union Muslim Congress. Such divergences were discernible also during the creation of the Islamic Renaissance Party in the early 1990's. Pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism and nationalism were hardly successful as political alternatives to Bolshevism and Communism in Soviet Central Asia (except among the Alash Ordians in Kazakhstan and the Azerbaijanis). Even the *jadid* (reformist) movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries had very limited response among the people. In Central Asia, nationalities were never very close to each other. What we have today is a desperate urge among Central Asians to prove that there was a gamut of 'national movements' in which *jadids*, national communists, *kurbashis* (local chieftains pejoratively called *basmachis* or bandits by the Soviets) equally took part.

One cannot but appreciate Roy's views about a Central Asian 'habitus'. According to him, in the present situation, the Central Asians derive more sustenance from their traditional solidarity groups and community networks. They no longer approve of the image of a Soviet nation state that was artificially constructed and alien to their culture.■

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India in the International System

P.R.Chari

INDO-RUSSIAN MILITARY AND NUCLEAR COOPERATION: LESSONS AND OPTIONS FOR U.S. POLICY IN SOUTH ASIA
By Jerome M. Conley
Lexington Books, Lanham, 2001, pp. xiii + 164, price not stated.

We have here a commendable short book on the issues noted in its title; the text is even more concise if the footnoting and bibliography are excluded. The author, a serving 'regional affairs' officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, addresses these issues in five chapters relating to the Cold War years, post-Cold War era, India's Strategic Culture, India's Nuclear Deterrent and, finally, Policy Options for the United States. The author's interest in nonproliferation issues and nuclear deterrent theory is reflected in these chapters.

The book's major thesis is that: " The "special" Moscow-New Delhi relationship during the Cold War was based upon Indian needs, American ambivalence and Soviet opportunism. In the post-Cold War era this relationship has persisted due to continued American ambivalence, short-term Indian military needs, and Russian economic needs." This continued till the very end of the Clinton era, but the installation of the Bush Administration in the United States heralds the possibility of a new Indo-U.S. relationship developing premised on the inherent conservatism of their governments. An improvement in Indo-US relations has obvious implications for Indo-Russian relations, but the umbilical cord of military cooperation that binds India and Russia together presages no weakening of these ties. Indo-U.S. linkages could proceed apace, however, in other directions of mutual interest like economic cooperation and the development of common approaches to international issues, especially that of dealing with an emerging China.

An initial cavil must be made here that the title of this excellent account of Indo-Soviet/ Russian-American relations is something of a misnomer. The book, in truth, focuses on India's defence and strategic policies, the place therein of Indo-Soviet/ Russian cooperation and the resultant U.S. concerns.

The chapter on post Cold War Indo-Russian relations, for instance, draws attention to a West oriented and Atlanticist group that dominated the Yeltsin/ Kozyrev era. This informed their anti-Indian and pro-Pakistani policies and exacerbated Indo-Russian bilateral disputes on the supply of cryogenic engines, debt scheduling and the rupee-ruble exchange rate. Following the elevation of Primakov as the Russian President a greater balance has been established between the western and Orientalist factions in the Kremlin leading to an improvement in Indo-Russian linkages. This has manifested itself by the agreement to sell two 1000 MW reactors for the Kudankalam Atomic Power Plant. A sharp reduction in military cooperation had followed the end of the Cold War due to the chaos prevailing in the Russian and former Soviet Republics, but this has revived after order was established in 1996. Arms sales take place now on a strictly commercial basis in contrast to the 'political' prices obtaining earlier. A bilateral $15 bn. military and technical cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries in 1998, and is expected to continue till 2015.

The author rightly believes that Indo-U.S. relations, in contrast, have remained hostage to the obsessive nonproliferation concerns of the United States, which should be de-emphasized if their engagement is to be strengthened. The Clinton visit institutionalized an Indo-U.S. re-engagement founded on a broader agenda like cooperation in counter-terrorism measures, science and technology, commerce and energy security. This suggests that a fit had obtained

between American Cold War blinkers and India's post-colonial complexes, which needs replacement by greater bilateral trust and confidence. More generally, the United States needs to balance Indo-U.S. ties with Sino-U.S. relations and Indo-Russian linkages.

There are several perceptive insights that the author has reached in this book.

First, the Russian past and future contribution to the Indian nuclear deterrent has and would be considerable. They include the Su-30 long-range bombers supplied, and the A-50 AWACs (Airborne Warning and Communications) aircraft and Tu-22 strike aircraft in the pipeline; lease of the Charlie I class nuclear submarines to train Indian crew, assistance in designing the indigenous Advanced Technology Vehicle (nuclear submarine) and the Sagarika ship/ submarine borne missile; and agreement to supply the S-300 anti-ballistic missiles, along with Pechora II surface-to-air missiles to establish a missile defence system against Pakistan.

Second, this extensive military cooperation would supplement other areas of tri-Service, Indo-Russian military cooperation like transfer of the *Admiral Gorshkov* aircraft carrier, and assistance for constructing Krivak-class destroyers and Kilo- and Amur-class submarines for the Navy; upgrading the MiG-21 bis, besides the lease and later purchase of Su-30 MKI and Tu-22 M3 aircraft for the Air Force; and the sale of T-90 tanks for the Army. The essential point here is that India can get almost anything it wants from Russia without any let or hindrance. So, it may be added, can China.

Third, whilst discussing India's strategic culture, the author laments its latent anti-western bias deriving from India's post-colonial suspicion of the former colonial powers; this was strengthened by western insensitivity to its nonaligned foreign policy and defence needs following the Sino-Indian border conflict. He also claims that India developed a permanent sense of paranoia arising from its insulated sub-continental polity, memory of invasions through history, presence of inimical neighbours, vulnerability to external subversion and the interdiction of its sea-lanes to the Gulf, intransigence of China and Pakistan. Over the years, the Gandhian and Nehruvian influence on India's strategic culture has been overlaid by a post-Congress provincial-party parochialism, Hindu militaristic fundamentalism that deifies nuclear weapons, anti-minorityism and latent anti-westernism.

Fourth, the author holds that the nuclear issue in India is linked to its domestic political worth. The Indian victory in Kargil is thus linked, in an incongruous way, to the nuclear tests that compelled Pakistan's restraint, and inhibited it from enlarging the conflict. Thereafter the release of the Indian nuclear doctrine and its decision to develop the longer range Agni-II missile were transparently designed to secure electoral gains.

Fifth, the author concludes that the Indo-Pak nuclear tests in 1998 only succeeded in restoring the conventional military balance in South Asia in Pakistan's favour. This is reflected in the Indian reluctance to extend the Kargil conflict beyond the Line of Control, lest it invite a nuclear response from Pakistan. Moreover, "the nuclearization of the Kashmir conflict has elevated the ongoing Indo-Pakistani border dispute to a priority concern in the international arena and has ensured that third party states, especially the United States, will continue to 'interfere' over this potential nuclear flash point". This has become evident from India's precipitous climb-down to initiate negotiations with Pakistan despite its earlier objections to this modality; American pressure, deriving from beliefs that Kashmir could trigger an Indo-Pak conflagration, seems to have been the catalyst for eroding the Indian obduracy.

By way of another cavil the author could have noted that India's defence and strategic policies since Independence have never been ideologically moulded in an anti-western or pro-Soviet/ Russian framework; it was informed by national self-interest. This would explain the thinness of Indo-Soviet/ Russian relations, largely restricted over the years to military and, selectively, political cooperation. India's ties with the West were more broad-based, extending to the educational, cultural, economic spheres and, increasingly, to political interactions; these bonds could burgeon in future to include the information technology area and be catalyzed by the growing expatriate Indian diaspora in all the western countries. That said, the book under review remains a useful guide to the most important relationships for India in the international system, and provides an easy and profitable read.■

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Tibet's Place in Central Asia

P.L. Mehra

TIBET: THE GREAT GAME AND TSARIST RUSSIA
By Tatiana Shaumian
Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. xii+223, Rs. 545.00

All through the later half of the 19th century and the opening decade of the 20th, the Great Game was the subject of voluminous outpourings, from the press and the platform. Of learned disquisitions and not so learned rhetoric and pamphleteering. And no end of lively, even animated debate. Essentially, the "Game" concerned the gradual—and not always so gradual—expansion of Tsarist Russia into the vast, empty spaces of the heart of Asia. Into fabled Samarkand and Bokhara and Khiva and on to the shores of the Caspian. Across the Pamirs to the frontiers of Great Britain's much-coveted Indian empire. Both Persia and Afghanistan felt the heat and the Raj was unnerved no end. For what Whitehall feared most was that through the soft underbelly of these hitherto largely inert, sleepy regions, the Cossacks might creep through , threatening the Raj and all it stood for.

To build barricades and mount defences against this seemingly unstoppable advance, the British employed all their skills. A good deal of adventure and spying was in order. So were small wars. From the late 1830s to the early 1920s, the British waged three such wars in Afghanistan alone. Their principal objective: to install a regime that could stem the Russian tide and at the same time be amenable to Whitehall's dictates.

Nor was the Afghan Amir the sole target of the Raj's attention. Nearer home, across the Himalayas, the Dalai Lama too attracted notice. Through the to-ings and fro-ings of the Buryat and Kalmyk Mongols who were subjects of the Great White Tsar, and among the most fervid of the Dalai Lama's followers, the Russians may build up in Tibet a danger zone, threatening the peace and security of Pax Brittanica. Tatiana Shaumian's thin volume under review concerns itself largely with this intriguing if fascinating facet of the Great Game. The broad outlines are easily mapped out. In Lhasa, in 1895 or thereabouts, the young and ambitious 13th Dalai Lama had attained adulthood after a bitter struggle with an unscrupulous Regent and his cohorts. Among his many advisors, one close to his person was a Buryat Mongol, Aguan Dorjieff. As if by coincidence, the youthful Lord Curzon, barely 40, and fresh from his laurels as an author of no mean repute and a rising Tory parliamentarian, took over the Indian Viceroyalty (1899). His one major obsession, both as a student at Oxford and later an indefatigable traveller in and around Persia, the Gulf and the Far East, was Russia. And the danger it posed to Britain's Indian empire. His singular ambition: to stem the tide and keep it as far as he could from the Indian glacis.

Even before Curzon arrived on the Indian

scene, there had been some minor skirmishes with the Tibetans across the Sikkim frontier. A few boundary pillars had been knocked down and some disputes had arisen about the border trade. Characteristically, the Viceroy magnified the incidents, sought out the Dalai Lama and demanded peremptory action. Meantime with a view to forging a closer link between the land of his birth and that of his spiritual guru, Dorjieff had made a couple of visits (1899-1900) to the Tsar. This was no small cause for anxiety to Curzon; what deepened his suspicion was the knowledge that Dorjieff had undertaken these journeys—undiscovered—through India!

Livid with rage, even as the mystery surrounding the Buryat failed to unravel, the Viceroy was shaken by the unbelievable. On his doorstep, the Russians were threatening to obtain a toehold in Tibet; its Dalai Lama willing to buy the Tsar's patronage.

Sadly, the Tibetan ruler proved singularly unresponsive to the Indian potentate's repeated overtures for a direct relationship. Worse, the Lama was rude and even failed to acknowledge the Viceroy's communications. Nor was the Manchu Amban any help. Not that he was unwilling; he was, to all appearances, powerless.

For once, Curzon found himself at his wits' end. To break this logjam, he decided on a march to Lhasa under the command of an old friend and fellow traveller, Francis Younghusband. And in the bargain, led a reluctant and stoutly unwilling HMG into a plan of action it had no heart to underwrite.

Once inside Tibet, Younghusband's principal effort was to establish and convincingly substantiate—the existence of a Russian conspiracy to overawe the domain of the Dalai Lama, by sap if not by storm. And make the Tibetan ruler into a Russian protégé, no less.

He was deeply disenchanted. To his great embarrassment, and that of the overbearing Curzon, the evidence to hand proved to be singularly thin. There were no Cossacks hanging around and hardly any Russian arms or ammunition. Nor yet any drill sergeants training a Tibetan army for battle array against an assault from without. As a matter of fact, there was no armed resistance worth the name and as Younghusband and his men marched into Lhasa, the Lama and Dorjieff made good their escape.

The Lhasa convention (September 1904) which Younghusband "negotiated" with the run-away and deposed Dalai Lama's regent, concerned itself largely with making Tibet into a vague British protectorate. In ratifying it however, Whitehall took the sting away by reducing the stipulated 75-year occupation of the Chumbi valley to three and withdrawing a proposed British resident hovering around Lhasa. A couple of years later China became a party through the Adhesion Agreement (1906) which largely restored the Amban's authority. Presently, the British concluded a deal with the Russians (1907) which in more ways than one brought the long saga of the great game to its unceremonial, if also unromantic close. As far as Tibet was concerned, both the powers agreed to a hands off policy.

That is where the major thrust of Tatiana's brief story tapers to an end. She does however continue the narrative over the next half a dozen years to comprehend the frustrations of the Dalai Lama's first exile (1904-9) with its futile overtures to win Russian support. And takes note of China's major assault on ethnic Tibet's well-entrenched hold on Kham, which it now sought to incorporate into the mainland. Above all, an ill-disguised attempt to suborn the Dalai Lama and extinguish the authority of his government.

Sadly for the reigning Ch'ing rulers, they had bitten more than they could chew. While happily for Tibet and its ruler, their seething discontent, bordering on an open rebellion, synchronized with the October (1911) revolution on the mainland. In its aftermath, China came round to accepting the British proposal for a tripartite, India-China-Tibet, conference at Simla to sort out the problem of its regaining some modicum of control at Lhasa. Where the rebellious Chinese army had beaten an ignominious retreat.

Apart from playing an honest broker between a defiant Dalai Lama unwilling to compromise and an equally stubborn China refusing to barter away its theoretical claims to a virtually non-existent authority, the British were keen to obtain Russian endorsement for a partial return to a measure of control in Tibet.

The Tsar's government, even though inching closer to Great Britain in the then fast looming European contest against Imperial Germany, proved singularly unwilling to give its nod of approval on Tibet until Whitehall agreed to a quid pro quo in Afghanistan. This was not acceptable to the British who argued that the concession they sought in Tibet had its counterpart in the near-control Russia had earlier acquired in Outer Mongolia. Despite a flurry of intense diplomatic exchanges in London as well as St Petersburg, the talks remained deadlocked. Nor in the final count were the British prepared to pick up the Russian tag, for with China's stubborn refusal to append its signatures to the Simla convention, Russian adherence to its terms held no major attraction.

Tatiana's "central theme", to use her own words, is that both Russia and China concealed the true motives of their interest in Tibet: its favourable strategic position in the heart of central Asia. While it is true that Russia never contemplated any direct military intervention in Tibet, it "skillfully and often successfully" exploited the Tibetan question to exert pressure on Great Britain and thereby obtain concessions in other regions more germane to its military-strategic and political interests. And to substantiate her argument points to the existence of a special clause on Tibet in the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907.

All this is old hat and as the author would doubtless bear out, unexceptional. Even a casual glance at any good map—sadly conspicuous by its absence in this book—would clearly demonstrate that Russia's closest strategic interests in Asia in the 19th century, as indeed in the 21st, were Afghanistan and Mongolia. Not Tibet. A distinguished Russian historian, Professor Kuleshov, whose work finds a mention in Tatiana's bibliography has in a recent article (not cited) gone much further than the author in heavily underlining Russia's "indifference" to the Tibetan problem. For while there may be talk of Tibet's "plans for Russia", there was no truth in Russia having "plans for Tibet". He cites the Russian foreign minister Sazonov telling his British counterpart, Grey (1904), that "it does not matter what we (HMG) do in Tibet, if only it is done *sub rosa*."[1] The great value of Tatiana's work lies in the fact that she has thoroughly ransacked the Russian archives to come up broadly with the thesis long widely held, that Aguan Dorjieff and his ilk, and their close proximity to the corridors of power in St Petersburg notwithstanding, the Tsarist government refrained from any direct help, much less encouragement to the Dalai Lama or his regime. And that neither then nor later did Russia evince any interest in Tibet or its affairs.

Deputy head of the Centre for Indian Studies in Moscow, Tatiana published her doctoral work, "Tibet in International Relations at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" way back in 1977. The present study, a "revised and expanded version" in English translation, would appear largely to confine itself to the original in Russian. For despite brave efforts to list some later titles in the bibliography, there is little evidence that more recent research and writings on the subject have been ploughed in the body of her work.

A brief personal note may be in order. Long before his work on the expedition to Lhasa—the *Younghusband Expedition, an Interpretation* (1968)—this reviewer published a short piece, 'Tibet and Russian Intrigue' in the *Royal Central Asian Journal* (1958). Combined with his later writings on the McMahon Line (1974), Tibetan polity (1976) and the Ladakh frontier (1993) it provoked a lively debate and kept up heightened interest in the subject. Tatiana's slim volume only serves to underline how very relevant the subject is even today for any meaningful understanding of Tibet's place in the heart of central Asia.■

[1] Nikolai S. Kuleshov, 'The Tibet Policies of Britain and Russia, 1900-14', *Asian Affairs* (formerly, Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society), 31, 1 February 2000, pp. 41-48. Professor Kuleshov's *Russia's Tibet File*, 1996 offers a simplified and condensed version of his detailed monograph, *Rossia I Tibet* (Russia and Tibet) published in Russian in 1992.

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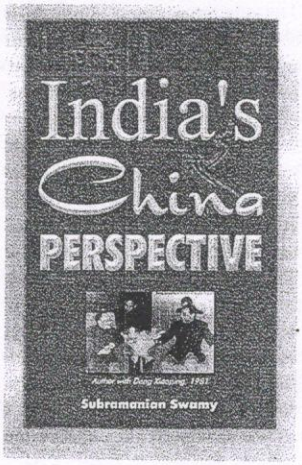
Learning from the Past

C.V. Ranganathan



INDIA'S CHINA PERSPECTIVE
By Subramaniam Swamy
Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. ix+187, Rs. 350.00

CHINA,THE WORLD AND INDIA
By Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea
Samskriti, New Delhi, 2001, pp. xv+480, Rs. 595.00

A common plea runs through the two books by two well known personalities. This is that in a world which has changed so enormously from the times India and China quarrelled in the late fifties and early sixties, it is imperative that they live in friendship, maximize opportunities for cooperation and realize the great potential for mutual benefit that exists in better relations between the two Asian neighbours and the earth's most populated countries. Both authors revisit the past since India's independence (1947) and China's "liberation" (1949) with a view to contributing to the unlearning of certain wrong lessons that the contemporary history of relations between the two countries has bequeathed the present.

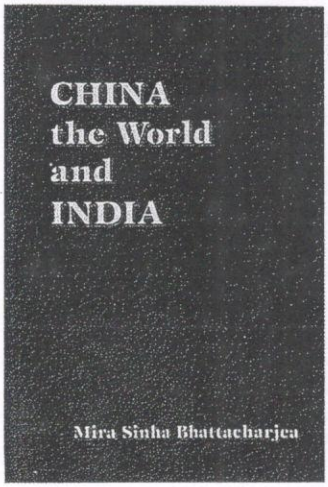
Both authors bring formidable credentials to their task. Swamy took a Ph.d. from Harvard specializing in economics and comparative studies of the Indian and Chinese economies in days when they were comparable, before China forged ahead. He became a tenure Professor there at an young age before his headlong plunge into Indian politics where, like the mythical monkey-king of Mao Ze Dong's poem, "he twirls his club to clear the firmament of dust." Mira, for a short period an Indian diplomat, devoted her career to China studies, indeed as a pioneer, in the Delhi University and later as a founder member of what has become the well known Institute of Chinese Studies. She has many works to her credit on China's foreign relations and India-China relations as well as a comparative study of Mao and Gandhi.

The common theme mentioned above is approached in widely contrasting styles by the two authors. Swamy is writing for a political constituency with the bluntness that is characteristic of his enduring oppositional role. Mira's is a collection of her published writings from 1971 to 2000, which is as timely today as when they were written for the serious attempt that is made to put events and the personalities that shaped them from the fifties to the nineties in the right domestic and external contexts in which India and China found themselves. The tenuous but short lived coexistence of the visions of Mao and Nehru for Asian resurgence built on the pillars of Sino-Indian friendship, the various domestic circumstances which impinged on them, their totally differing situations during the Cold War, their relationships with the Super Powers, the baleful impact of the Sino-Soviet conflict on deteriorating Sino-Indian relations and Mao's independent revolutionary goals for a go-it-alone China, are dealt with exhaustively in five lengthy pieces in Part I of Mira's book. Countering perceived Soviet hegemony became a primary Maoist aim from the late fifties even as China and USA were in confrontation. This period also coincided with deliberate attempts by the erstwhile Soviet Union to befriend India and adopt a neutral posture in the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. This angered Mao as continuing evidence of Soviet betrayal of "socialist solidarity". The confrontation with India, though expressed in territorial terms, thus had wider political connotations.

Swamy's treatment of the Sino-Indian conflict is to squarely blame Nehru and his advisers for seeking to profit from pre-independence Imperialist legacies, for taking costly decisions on where India's borders should lie in the north-west which India could not defend, and finally when it was found necessary to have a more robust military response, of following an ill-prepared and adventurist course. Missed opportunities to secure agreements on India's border with China in 1954 when the Agreement on Trade between India and the Tibetan Region of China was negotiated and later in 1960 when Premier Zhou Enlai visited India, when tensions surrounding the boundary dispute were high, are detailed by Swamy. He however stops short of suggesting concrete solutions to the long standing boundary dispute which both countries can pragmatically accept given the emergence of a statusquo on the boundary which neither side has sought to upset since the conflict. While Nehru shares the brunt of his criticism on what went wrong for India on the border dispute, he does find fault with Zhou Enlai for being less than candid in his several discussions with Nehru in 1954 and 1957 when he had opportunities to reveal the full extent of China's disagreements with India. Swamy, rightly in this reviewer's view, questions the validity of the claims made by both India and China that each had presented cast-iron cases on the boundary. There is clearly room for pragmatic negotiations to reach agreements which both sides could accept if the necessary political will is exercised. Sadly this has been in deficit in both countries for over two decades.

Mira's approach to the vexed boundary dispute is to study the Chinese negotiating strategy and experience in successfully reaching agreements with numerous neighbours surrounding China in all directions. In various contributions in her book Mira shows that by and large China's approach has been to draw a distinction between historical claims which she had made in the past and the administrative situation on the ground. Those historical claims needed to uphold strategic requirements are tenanciously upheld while those claims over lands which are peripheral to such requirements and are in adverse possession are compromised through a process of give and take in the larger interest of consolidating friendly relations.

For Swamy, the ambivalence of Indian policies over Tibet adopted by successive Indian Governments over the last four decades is at the crux of Sino-Indian relations. In a hard-hitting chapter devoted to the role of Tibet in Sino-Indian relations, which is not calculated to endear Swamy to the exiled Tibetans, he is of the conviction that a Tibetan government-in-exile led by Holy Highness the Dalai Lama is the biggest irritant in Sino-Indian relations. Calling for a more transparent policy on the part of the Government of India, he is for the adoption of a policy which would avoid either of two extreme policies: one of making Tibetans in India feel unwelcome or even forcing them to leave India. The other is to support the freedom of Tibet. To say, as he does, that neither option is in India's interest is actually to define the policy of the Government of India. For India the best denouement of the Tibetan question is for the Chinese to create the conditions for the dignified and safe return of the Dalai Lama and his followers to Tibet and for the Tibetans to be moderate in their demands about the condition of such return. Sincere negotiation between the Chinese and Tibetans offer the only path through which this can be achieved. This reviewer feels that Swamy has overstated the case on Tibet when he says that the Indian Government's



provocative posture on Tibet is the sole obstacle to better Sino-Indian relations. At least from 1988, when Rajiv Gandhi visited China, the Chinese have appreciated the fact that successive governments of India regard Tibet as an autonomous region of China, although they have an expectation, which cannot be met, that Government of India exercises greater restraints on the Tibetans in India. Mira's views on Tibet amount to support of the Indian Government's positions but her conclusions are arrived at through a studious study.

The essence of Swamy's book is contained in chapter 4, titled 'The Strategic Perspectives in Sino-Indian Relations'. Summarizing the various periods of ups and down in relations, he concludes that the rise of armed militancy in the wake of religious fundamentalism poses great dangers to sensitive regions of China such as Xinjiang as well as India. Combating this should provide a new common platform for India and China to cooperate and build up a strong political rapport which could extend to other areas of instability which are also important to both countries and in South East Asia. He feels such cooperation could also provide a basis for lessening the impact of Sino-Pakistan friendship which bedevil relations between India and China. In this chapter he also seeks to put to rest what he sees as a psychological fear of Chinese strength, an offshoot of the 1962 debacle on the part of our military establishment. Rather it would appear that Swamy suggests close cooperation between the armed forces and navies of the two countries to safeguard common interests such as security of sea-lanes, prevention of piracy, and the spread of narcotic and arms smuggling etc.

In the concluding chapter of his book Swamy compares the present economic trajectory of India and China, but unlike so many foreign and Indian economists, he is not pessimistic about prospects of India catching up with China. Indeed he proposes this as a slogan. He suggests a mix of economic policies towards this end.

Forcefully arguing against joining any attempts to "contain" China, Swamy proposes an India-China compact to cooperate closely in the 21st century. Mira has persuasively argued the same point over three decades through explaining China and showing that rational Indian policies of recent years towards China can elicit beneficial results for India. Albeit the widely contrasting approaches, both books need to be read by those interested in advancing Sino-Indian relations. ■

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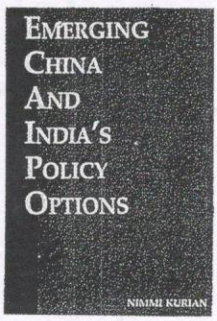
Need for Pragmatic Directions



Sonika Gupta

EMERGING CHINA AND INDIA'S POLICY OPTIONS
By Nimmi Kurian
Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 227, Rs. 495.00

Until recently China Studies in India have suffered from a hangover of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict. In fact, Nehru's personal disillusionment with the failure of his *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai* policy has been systematically worked into both policy and academic debates with the result that there has been little forward thinking in the field. In the past few years a momentum has been building up in writings on China to move away from this position. Nimmi Kurian's book successfully breaks out of the 1962 hangover to attempt a mapping of an economically and militarily resurgent China. The strength of the book lies in that it advocates a pragmatic approach towards Sino-Indian relations based on greater economic interaction and cooperation on global issues of common concern. The book has two substantive parts. The first part deals with a comprehensive analysis of reasons and results of an emerging China and the second part explores India's policy option vis-à-vis an emergent China.

According to Kurian, the Indian fascination to view China either as an intimate friend or enemy is incomprehensible. Such an approach has hindered any fruitful engagement with China with the result that India has been unable to build a meaningful relationship with one of its most important neighbours. However, a broader relationship with China must also include an appreciation of India's security concerns vis-à-vis China. Kurian argues that military security is a vital component of a China policy based on the concept of comprehensive security. Kurian's argument addresses the fundamental flaw in Nehru's China Policy (which, incidentally, was the last we had a China policy). Nehru neglected the first rule of international relations when he assumed that extending a hand of friendship towards China meant no vigilance on our part to secure India's borders with China.

Kurian has effectively used the issue of South China Seas to build a case for being vigilant on the strategic front while formulating a policy of greater interaction with China. Chinese political establishment has time and again stated its desire to have peaceful relations with ASEAN members to facilitate trade. On the other hand, China has codified in its domestic law the right to use force to defend disputed maritime territories such as Mischief Reef, Fiery Reef and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, which it has occupied and claims as its own. The argument that China's increased integration with the world economy will act as a deterrent against the use of force by China is countered by Kurian. She says that the increased economic integration is a symbiotic relationship and to expect it to play a moderating role would be an overstatement.

Kurian identifies the triangular relationship between the US, China and Japan, with the US playing the balancing role, as the pivot of regional security in the Asia Pacific region. However, not enough attention has been paid to a discussion of Sino-US relations. The chapter on emerging China would have benefited from such a discussion with a succinct mention of key issues between the two countries to complete the picture of an emergent China. The bilateral relationship has been identified by both US and China as important in terms of national security as well as trade.

Taking on the current debate about the possibility of disintegration of China, Kurian opines that in China, the forces of integration and decentralization are at work simultaneously. Economic decentralization is the order of the day with nationalism providing the necessary binding factor in a post-Communist society. More importantly, Kurian observes that in the absence of a viable political alternative to the Chinese Communist Party and with a weak and fragmented civil society, the threats to integration are not urgent. However, China does face a number of serious domestic challenges which it must resolve in its endeavour to achieve comprehensive national strength. Demographic explosion, food, energy and water security, banking reforms, income disparities, regional imbalances, ethnic unrest in Xinjiang are a few of the issues dealt with in the book. According to Kurian the future of China will come to be shaped by the manner in which these contradictions are resolved.

Kurian's argument for a comprehensive approach to security is a response to China's emergence as the regional economic and military power. Since India and China are both emerging Asian powers it is but natural that they will compete in more areas and not just military power. In fact, many analysts in India regard the competition for investment capital and export markets as the more fractious area of interaction between India and China. On the political front, the issue of providing leadership to a Third World bloc at international fora is another topic of debate in the context of Sino-Indian relations.

Analysing Sino-Indian relations within the domestic linkages of Chinese foreign policy , Kurian makes substantive policy prescriptions to improve Sino-Indian relations. To facilitate the process of normalization currently on, a wide network of linkages need to be developed to intensify contact at all levels. On the economic front, product diversification is suggested to expand mutual trade. In addition, B2B relations and direct air and sea routes need to be expanded. Kurian advocates sub regional economic cooperation as a preferred way to develop greater trade and commerce between China and India. She identifies North Eastern India and South Western China as regions with great potential in this regard. Including Myanmar in sub regional cooperation, reviving the Southern Silk Route is also suggested. Greater economic engagement has to be supported by political commitment on both sides which can be initiated by a process of CBMs.

In an appraisal of China's policy towards India, Kurian says that China follows a strategic policy of containment and engagement. However, India has not exploited its strategic opportunities in the region. She makes a strong case for expanding its relationship with Myanmar and greater participation in ASEAN as well, which she calls a stepping stone to APEC membership.

The book has dealt comprehensively with the emergence of China as a military and economic actor in international politics. All arguments are substantiated with extensive empirical evidence. However, a few suggestions may be made regarding the second part of the book. Since the book seeks to make policy recommendations to improve Sino-Indian relations, a discussion of specific issues between the two countries would have provided sharpened focus. In its present form, Sino-Indian relations are subsumed under the general discussion on the regional situation. For example, the issue of Tibet has not been touched upon in the study and it is an issue that is relevant to both domestic and foreign policy analysis of China. A more issue-oriented approach would have made the book more useful to policymakers. The study does, however, enhance the field of Chinese Studies in India in that it successfully tackles the need for a pragmatic direction to India's China policy.■

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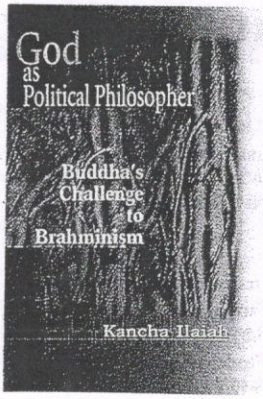
Postulating Culture

K.P. Shankaran



GOD AS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER: BUDDHA'S CHALLENGE TO BRAHMANISM
By Kancha Ilaiah
Samya Prakashan, Calcutta, 2000, pp. 244, Rs. 400.00

It was Ernest Gellner who argued, eloquently and convincingly, that all agrarian societies—except those that existed under special environmental conditions—were intolerably oppressive for the majority of its members. The situation in agrarian India was no different. In fact there was an extra dimension to the oppressiveness that existed among the communities of the Indian subcontinent that came under the sign of Hinduism. A vast majority of the Hindu community lived under the humiliating condition of "untouchability" and the wantonness that went with it. These conditions, and the associated socio-economic depravities suffered by the majority, have led many to question the desirability of the category called "Hinduism" itself.

The book under review, as I take it, is one such attempt and therefore deserves to be taken in that spirit. In other words if one dismisses books of this kind as one of those "not-so-well-researched- written-efforts", one would only be exhibiting one's own insensitivity to the desire of millions of people to get out of the humiliating grip of that 15th century invention called "Hinduism". How "Hinduism" (the category, not the artefact it refers to) came into being is well narrated by Romila Thapar in her *Interpreting Early India* and the author of the book under review, Kancha Ilaiah accepts Thapar as a historian with a historical perspective he agrees with. If Hinduism, as Thapar says, is a consequence of the Islamic/Christian attempt to understand the alien cultural scenario they confronted in the Indian subcontinent, then the concept of Hinduism cannot apply to pre-Islamic India.

The question I would like to pose at this point is this: Were the unique conditions created by the caste-based society in the pre-Hindu Indian subcontinent as nasty and unjustifiable as they happened to become during the Hindu period? According to Romila Thapar (and the evidence) except for *candelas* no one, in practice, was deprived of upward social mobility. Since we know that the majority of the people were not *candelas* in the pre-Hindu India, the large-scale and widespread oppressiveness of the current "Hindu" period was absent in that epoch. If this conjecture is tenable, then Ilaiah's suggestion to the Dalitbhujan movement to reject everything associated with the Sanskrit culture of pre-Islamic, pre-Hindu India is unnecessary. I say this largely because the cultures associated with Sanskrit produced one of the most sophisticated textual traditions of the world and particularly during the period 1st to 12th centuries A.D. it was, arguably, richer, more voluminous, and considerably more sophisticated than any other contemporary textual tradition of the world. The admirers of this tradition are grateful to Thapar for giving them a good reason to disassociate Sanskrit culture from the culture of Hinduism. This Sanskrit tradition was not the monopoly of the Brahmins of pre-Hindu India. The Buddhists, the Jains and the Sceptics also contributed to its glory.

Kancha Ilaiah in *God As Political Philosopher: Buddha's Challenge to Brahmanism* dismisses Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi as a "retrogressive thinker". I sympathize with him, if the reference is to the "father of the nation". But there is another Gandhi, the author of the pamphlet entitled *Constructive Programme*, and respected by libertarian socialists the world over. This figure—though a Hindu from the libertarian socialist point of view—was a sparkling political radical. His " Hinduism" was an understandable mistake, purely a product of his historical context [He died much before he could be enlightened by Thapar's version of the origin of "Hinduism"]. From the libertarian socialist point of view, Gandhi's utopia "swaraj" is the picture of a non-coercive social order, and if I understand Ilaiah correctly, it is in no way dissimilar to the utopia of the Dalitbahujans. If this is true then the Ambedkarien neo-Buddhist like Ilaiah can work with the Gandhian socialists to achieve a non-coercive social order.

Ilaiah treats Hinduism as a religion and in this he may be right (after all it is a product of Turkmanid, Persian, and European misreadings of the pre-Islamic cultures of the subcontinent). But the Brahmanism, like the Buddhism of pre-Hindu India was not definitely a religion, if by religion we mean anything that even vaguely resembles the Judo-Christian-Islamic complex. It was a sort of polytheistic culture, which also, within it, allowed/ tolerated the denial of gods. These kinds of cultures are exceedingly complex and it is impossible to measure them by the standards applicable to monotheistic contexts. As a word of criticism let me add that even though Ilaiah vehemently protests against the use of the orientalist historiographic grid, he himself, like the nationalist historians whom he rightly criticizes, ends up using it unselfconsciously. Let me close this review with a quotation from Romila Thapar's book *The Past and Prejudice*: "A popular culture cannot be built on the negative postulate of anti-Brahmanism. This merely becomes a self-destroying myth".■

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Communication

I am afraid I am constrained to point out that Ajanta Dutt's Review of *The Makers of Indian English Literature* ("Indian English Literature—Then and Now"—*The Book Review*, June 2001, pp. 14-16) "suffers" from a gross misreading of the paper included in the volume, "Raja Rao : The Chessmaster of Indian English". It is "strange" that she should find the use of the epithet "The Chessmaster" unjustifiable merely because his one novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves* is excluded from discussion for practical reasons. How naive to interpret the phrase so literally! It is as though his reputation as a "master" rests only on this particular novel and his other works do not entitle him to such praise! Surely, the title for the paper was influenced not by any one single work but his total output which splendidly exemplifies his craftsmanship and genius as a "Maker". And the "linguistic examples" not simply "listed" as unjustly alleged but woven into the texture of the paper are invoked to evoke a whole way of life besides forming the very basis of evaluation.

Equally dismaying is the reviewer's liberal use of adjectives, hackneyed phrases and indecorous clipping of contributors' names. It is a pity that Indian reviewers should do their job "perfunctorily" and "cavalierly" as observed by Professor Iyengar and quoted, ironically by the reviewer herself!

There is little doubt that it "remains so even today"!

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Lenin and Current Globalization

Rakesh Gupta

LENIN: IMPERIALISM—THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM: A POPULAR OUTLINE
Introduction by Prabhat Patnaik
LeftWord, New Delhi, 2000, pp. Rs. 250.00 (Hardcover), Rs. 85.00 (Paperback).

The present comment is on the introduction and not on Lenin's work. Comments on the basic text can only be inferred, if at all. The reader must also be cautioned that the reviewer has had sympathy with at least one Party pursuing dialects of revolution here in this country. The review of the introduction hopefully does not suffer from past history. The introduction is welcome on numerous counts. First, education of those who draw their understanding of Marxism from Party school education and not from the official academia. In any case very little happens on that count in the ideological apparatuses both in the Third World and any other world. I am not familiar with what is happening in China now. A report on the Internet mentions that in one of the universities in the USA some students have again started showing some interest in the writings of Marx after having exhausted their interest in the brick mortar of the Berlin wall. One does not know the nature of the interest but the fact is that in our institutions of higher learning its either Structural, Critical and Gramsician Marxism that filters down belatedly.

Second, that an academic in India is doing this is doubly welcome. It is an exercise in educating the new party cadre as well as the university graduate wherever Lenin is in need of a lung or a heart machine. Pardon the expressions since new generations of students are only familiar with the fall of Lenin's statues accompanied by theses on end of history and clash of civilizations after the fall of the Soviet Union. The new finance capital in terms of 'hot money' is the explanation of this fall provided by Patnaik(p. 27). From the perspective of the Party and the graduate the introduction can be neatly divided though they are mutually interdependent. The introduction has 33 pages. The first part is of twenty-two pages and the second part is of the rest of the pages. Do not go by the number of pages. If one did, then the text introduced is also very thin in length but has layers of analyses before it was written. The point is that for writing his text on imperialism Lenin had maintained his notes on imperialism as he did on Philosophy. What unite both Patnaik's introduction and Lenin's text are the preparatory materials since, among other things, Patnaik also refers to substantial points he has made elsewhere in his other writings. He draws upon them. Those not familiar with his other writings may have some difficulty.

Third, students in the Third World academia will do well to look at this work since the dollar, under conditions of globalization, produces a reification of the market oriented Agenda determined by the specificities of the current internationalization of finance capital at one level and prevents even conditions of primitive accumulation of capital in different capitals. The lure of expanding opportunities of employment for one section of the middle classes has nothing of an imposition that would otherwise be the case if imperialism had only meant desolate landscapes. The restructuring of syllabi being undertaken in the universities in the wake of globalization now would require analyses that produce what Derrida would say *differance*. I am not suggesting that the introduction needs to be looked at from that perspective since Marxism also is subjected to that scalpel in its tradition. What is being underlined is that the introduction needs to be viewed as making a difference and deferment of the readily acceptable current agenda of globalization. If one still arrives at the same course of action then it is a different matter. Patnaik, it appears to me, may also not be surprised. The purpose of Patnaik in writing this text is ' ...Lenin's *Imperialism* itself must first be thoroughly studied and understood. The purpose of bringing out this text which follows is precisely to aid this study and understanding'(p. 33). To be more precise he believes that '...different bourgeois and petty bourgeois political parties, afraid of triggering off capital flight, swear allegiance to the same set of policies of 'liberalization', so that people are denied any effective political choice' (p. 32). Between these two quotes a question comes up. What is the position of the radical wings within the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and the working classes? Radicalization today is by new social movements of the petty bourgeoisie. How do we analyse them and place them, if we mean business of revolution to have class alliances and not create sects? But that is another that falls outside the boundaries of the current introduction though not outside the purpose of the study.

The basic concern of the introduction is the discovery of contradictions in the current phase of finance capital. Like Lenin Patnaik rejects any functional interpretation of imperialism. Like Lenin he regards that the current phase of relative stabilization of capital (like during 1871 and 1914 examined by Lenin) is not functional but constitutive of capital stability and its other—instability. The consequences of this new phase are five for the Third World (a la Lenin for the world capitalism then). These are (a) stagnation, higher unemployment, and a regressive shift in income distribution, which together accentuate poverty; (b) abrogation of economic and political sovereignty through the manning of key posts by pro-imperialist politicians and bureaucrats, linkages of economic ministries with world funding agencies; (c) handing over of national assets at throw away prices; (d) squeeze of the working people and attenuation of democracy that leads to absence of effective alternative political choice; (e) blooming of hundred flowers in terms of exclusivist and chauvinist movements of various kinds. All this stymies 'the emergence of revolutionary challenges to imperialism by dividing the people'(p.32).

Since Patnaik mentions the ultra imperialism of Karl Kautsky and the Communist International that overcame the limitations of the Second International that was dominated by Karl Kautsky I am raising the issue though not joining issue with Patnaik. Lenin had said during the meetings of the Second International that the nature of impending war is imperialist and it needs to be turned into a civil war against the high priest of imperialism—Renegade Kautsky. He also mentioned that Russia was to be the new centre of Revolution when the Centrists had said that even May Day need not be celebrated on May 1, let alone conceding possibilities of class struggle. Social chauvinists like Plekhanov joined Kautsky then. A similar, though under different conditions, the phenomenon of imperialism is manifesting its stranglehold. At the end of this tunnel, no light seems to be alluded to by Patnaik at the global or the level of India. Is India now a sub-imperialism unable to assert in its humble way an alternative agenda? At least Samir Amin thinks that India like China can offer an alternative to the dominant international finance. Second, what about the working class movement in India? Has it been incorporated after its various splits on sectarian issues? Third, in terms of the dominant neo-liberal agenda, what is the alternative that the Communists are suggesting, even if one accepts their marginalization? Patanaik's answer is too general to discuss but can be noted as far as this book is concerned. He says new wars are creating new conjunctures and there is need to consolidate gains from these. He mentions Iraq and Yugoslavia. But still the question is how does the working class establish links with the working people there?

The introduction may also be read from the perspective of formulating strategies of change in which the Indian bourgeois and petty bourgeois will exhibit fighting potential at different levels. One could read it from many Anglo-Saxon perspectives as well as other theoretical perspectives.■

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From Prince to Frog: The Sad Story of Bertrand Russell

By T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan

BERTRAND RUSSELL: THE GHOST OF MADNESS, 1921-70
By Ray Monk
Free Press, 2001, pp. 574, price not mentioned.

For most people there is something deeply satisfying about elevating a person to a pedestal and then proceeding to chip away, not just at the pedestal but at its occupant as well. Ray Monk's excellent biography of Bertrand Russell (this is the second volume) fits that category well. The mathematics genius of Volume 1 turns into a rather pathetic and intellectually lonely figure in Volume 2. The logician who, along with the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, co-authored *Principia Mathematica* slowly dissolves into a slightly ridiculous figure whose works don't deserve even passing mention. Seldom in the history of knowledge has a Prince turned so comprehensively into a frog. Or, as G M Trevelyan, said, "He may be a genius in mathematics. As to that I am no judge. But about politics, he's a perfect goose." Others were less polite.

What went wrong? Russell, according to Monk, simply lost it after the prodigal effort that went into the *Principia*. It was a case of burnout, with knobs on. Russell seems to have recognized this, because he once famously said, "My brain is not what is was. I am past my best —and therefore, of course, I am now celebrated." There was also the ever-present need for money which, thought Russell, would only come from 'journalism', that is, quickies and pot boilers of the sort that he became famous for in the second half of his life.

This volume starts when Russell was 49. In that sense it deals with the less interesting half of his life. For by then, Russell himself was beginning to feel the impossibility, or at least the difficulty, of continuing with mathematics. "The brain becomes rigid at 50", he told Virginia Woolfe once, adding that between the ages of 28 and 38, he had lived in a cellar and worked. Then he said, "my passions got hold of me". The picture that emerges from this book, therefore, is of a man not at peace either with himself or the world but of a restless has-been desperately trying to keep his own self-esteem in tact.

According to Monk, Russell appears to have been driven by two fundamental traits of character — a deep-rooted fear of going mad and a colossal vanity. He seeks to explain much of Russell's later conduct on the basis of these two factors but is generous enough to say, "I am conscious that other pictures could be drawn in which Russell is presented in a very different light." I am glad, because for what it may be worth, because even his so-called journalistic works don't stand up to rigorous academic scrutiny, Russell did manage to please and inform millions of readers about important issues.

Most of his friends seem to have correctly identified the reason why Russell produced such an enormous amount of second-rate writing. It was that, partly, he approached politics as a logician might, and simply could not come to terms with the messiness of it. The result was a tendency to oversimplify every issue stating it in either/or terms and never acknowledging that politics, being the art of compromise, belonged essentially to the in-between gray areas.

This leads Monk to ask a question which almost everyone appears to have asked Russell: why did he stop doing what he was so good at and start doing what he was so bad at. He narrates a story that on one of his lecture tours to the US, the principal of a respectable girls college asked why he had given up philosophy. Russell's reply, possibly apocryphal, was "because I discovered I preferred fucking." This may sound a little out of character with the way Russell generally spoke, but it certainly fits in with what he told Virginia Woolfe about his passions getting hold of him.

Its more probable, however, that his interest in mathematics was killed by Ludwig Wittgenstein who took a machete into the thickets of Russell's theory of judgement and left him quite shattered. That was in 1913. Then along came the First World War when nothing much went on either in philosophy or in mathematics. But soon after it was over, in fact in 1919 itself, when Wittgenstein's work on logic and philosophy was published.

It convinced Russell that he had probably got most of his basic premises wrong. Until he read Wittgenstein, he said, he had viewed logic as a study of objective and eternal truths. After he read him, he realized that so-called logical truths were nothing more than tautologies. Wittgenstein utterly devastated him when he said that logic, far from being a body of truth, was merely "different ways of saying the same thing". So powerful was Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's work that he abandoned the philosophy of mathematics forever.

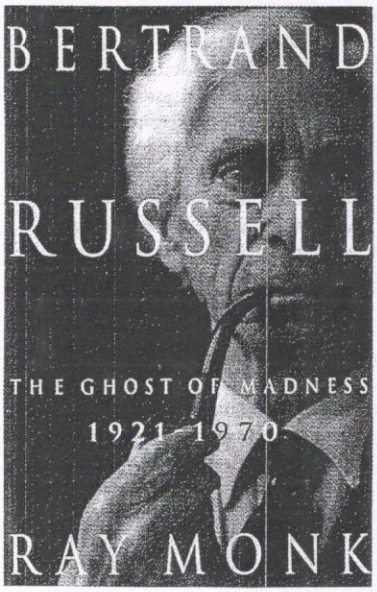
The matter, however, was not to end there. Kurt Godel, the German mathematician who, with his theorem of incompleteness in 1931 had stirred up (of all institutions) the Catholic Church, was convinced that Russell had been wrongly influenced by Wittgenstein. Godel thought that Russell's original position, that mathematics is indeed a body of truths concerning objective reality rather than a linguistic rigmarole, was the correct one. In a book consisting of essays aimed at reviewing Russell's work, Godel wrote that "It seems to me that the assumption of such objects (numbers, classes and so on) is quite as legitimate as the assumption of physical bodies and there is quite as much reason to believe in their existence." However, Russell refused to take Godel seriously and refused to resume the Platonic assumptions. This, says Monk, is indicative of the extent to which mathematics had ceased to matter to Russell. He never went back to it.

Not so with philosophy, though. By the mid-1930's Russell was badly in need for money -- mostly to pay alimony. The potboilers were not doing well and the income from them was nowhere near what Russell needed. So he thought he would have another crack at philosophy and teaching it because that was the only way of ensuring a sufficient and steady income. But he needed a comeback performance to convince everyone that there was life in the old dog yet. Thus did the paper 'Limits to Empiricism' got written. In it he tried to challenge Wittgenstein.

But Wittgenstein didn't respond. One consequence of this was that the paper is not as well known among academic philosophers as it ought to be. But it did achieve its main objective of announcing Russell's intention to return to academics. The attempt wasn't, however, very successful. He even wrote to G. E. Moore asking for a job at Cambridge but Moore, doubtless because Russell had now been out of academics since 1914 and even before hadn't had a very long teaching career, didn't sound very encouraging. Eventually, Russell had to go off to the US to earn the money he needed.

The University of Chicago in 1938 was a far cry from Oxford and Cambridge. It was provincial, run by a manager and Russell had to teach huge classes of 150 or so (compared to half a dozen in England) of uneven quality. It wasn't a very happy time for him, although he did have the gratification of having some established philosophers like Carnap attend his lectures. The job finished in 1939 and he moved on to California.

The job at UCLA was, if anything, even less satisfying. He found its students stupid and management autocratic. He once wrote to someone, "It is the custom of this country to keep all intelligent people so harassed and hustled that they cease to be intelligent. I have been suffering from this custom." He began looking for another job almost at once and in early 1941, was appointed to the City University of New York (CCNY)—with disastrous consequences.



The Episcopal Bishop of New York, Dr. William T. Manning, was outraged that a man he regarded as a moral deviant who advocated adultery and promiscuity, should be appointed to a post funded by the City. He started a campaign against Russell, which blew up into a huge controversy. Russell was called all sorts of names, including 'the professor of paganism' and 'a desiccated, divorced and decadent advocate of promiscuity." The resulting hysteria led to the decision to appoint Russell being reviewed at the board meeting but the motion to revoke it was defeated. The matter was then taken to court by a woman who had nothing to do with the case. There, the judge after reading Russell's potboilers decided that Russell was morally unfit to teach at CCNY. In the meantime, Russell had declined to become a US citizen (a technical requirement not often invoked but dug out now) saying that it was a stupid law which he would oppose. Russell stayed on in America until 1944 and it wasn't a very peaceful sojourn. In 1944, he was invited back to England by Trinity College, and he gladly accepted.

But the England he returned to was different in almost every respect, the most important of which was the fact that as a philosopher, Russell stood nowhere. If anything, his reputation was greater amongst the general public as a writer of easily comprehensible books with simple views. This reputation was to last for the rest of his life.

Russell died in 1970. In spite of the huge treatise in the philosophy of mathematics and his three wives, he left behind no worthwhile legacy.■

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An Englishman's Quest

Uma Dasgupta

INDIA'S PRISONER: A BIOGRAPHY OF EDWARD JOHN THOMPSON 1886-1946
By Mary Lago
University of Missouri Press, Missouri and London, 2001, pp. 388, price not mentioned.

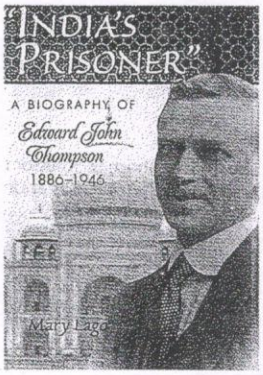
> *"10th. Today beg. Cloudy, and I restless, I went out in the afternoon; had to shelter in the palmyras from rain. Saw three boys in one of our jham-trees, shaking to a comrade below. Ran a pen over [illegible], adding ten lines here and removing a line there. At night there was a hoary moon with rays about her face, and a long light-crimson scarf below her; or to the west, on my left of Susunia, were golden wastes that seemed as if they would never go. I stood between the Eastern and the Western glory, uncertain at wh. To gaze."*

The extract is from the *Diary Leaves* of Edward John Thompson written from Bankura in Bengal on 10th June 1911. The feeling he expresses of standing metaphorically between the "Eastern and Western glory" somehow conjures up what in effect his life was about. He often felt uncertain 'at which to gaze'. Mary Lago's *India's Prisoner* is a closely researched biography about such a man who was a Methodist missionary teaching English Literature at Bankura Wesleyan College from 1910 to 1923. In 1923 he returned to England with a peripheral job at Oxford of teaching Bengali to the Indian Civil Service probationers coming to Bengal. Thompson never again came to live in India but returned on successive visits during the 1930s. India became a loving though painful focus of his life in more ways than one. In this biography his life is chronologically and thematically presented over twenty-four chapters. The biographer rightly devotes the largest amount of space to Thompson's gallant service to the two World Wars in "Chaplaining" and "Chaplaining Again". His temporary career as a Wesleyan missionary, with all of its Victorian 'high seriousness' and its Nonconformity, is also prominently presented in two chapters, "Bankura"and "Breaking with Bankura". Thompson's role as an anxious and persistent courier for better understanding between the British Government and the Indian Nationalists is well documented, but not so the course of his friendship with the Nationalists. Thompson came close to Nehru, Sapru, Jayakar, Krishna Menon and Gandhi (almost in that order). Gandhi once postponed his weekly day of silence to accommodate a visit from Thompson. The biography does not omit Thompson's strong Indian friendships but does not feel for it as Thompson or his family did. Theodosia Thompson's unpublished "memoirs" of her husband's last days describes how Thompson looked up at the ceiling from his deathbed on receiving a letter from Nehru and said, "Lord, now you may let thy servant go in peace".

In his letter Nehru acknowledged Thompson's loyalty to India and their own precious friendship. It was Gandhi who called Thompson "India's prisoner", the title of this biography. At a loss over his cause Thompson wrote a book in 1932 calling it *A Farewell to India*. He was fed up of being misunderstood in some Indian circles, angry at being accused of racism by the Anglo Indian community, and in despair over British official indifference to his appeals. Perceiving Thompson's pain Gandhi said to him, "How do you think that you are ever going to say farewell to India? You are India's prisoner". The biographer finds Gandhi's comment "pungent" (p. 246). One wonders why.

Thompson's entire life demonstrated a fanaticism for justice with its consequent frustrations. He hammered away to bridge the gap between Indian nationalist politics and the 'legitimacy' of Empire. The biography tells us how he insisted that if the English knew the facts and saw that both sides were at fault, they would better understand Indian nationalism (p. 216). He wanted anxiously to be an "explainer" between the two peoples and their societies. He believed that that could be done by educating the two countries about each other's 'mind' and 'thought', particularly Britain's about India. He believed he could use his personal friendship with Indians to bring trust over Britain. Thompson requested even the BBC to let him give radio talks about the Buddha and Rammohan Roy. We have Malcolm Darling, at the time BBC's Director of Eastern Services, writing to Thompson on 26 August 1941. "As to the suggested talk about the Buddha and Rammohan Roy, I should very much like to have another talk by you, especially as you say that you wish to use your personal friendships with Indians to help them to trust our people..." Thompson brought that same philosophical but frenzied approach to his own scholarly research on the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, a subject he stayed with all his life. Thompson knew Tagore's language, Bengali, and could not tolerate what he felt to be an 'orientalist' approach to the appreciation of Tagore's poetry in English translation.

Edward Thompson channelled his passion for justice, also his commitment to describing or explaining the Indian mind, into his books. He was remarkably productive particularly considering how his life and career were never quite comfortable or cushy. His novels and plays, books of poetry, seriously researched work on Indian political and social history, translations from Bengali vernacular literature, two scholarly books of literary criticism about Tagore, add up to well over thirty volumes. This is not counting his innumerable journalistic pieces mostly about



India. All that from someone who worried himself to pieces over everything he engaged in—War, Empire, India, Literature and Poetry, Religion, Conscience. He lived intensely and tried hard to balance two worlds, his Englishman's heritage with an instinctive Indian consciousness. Nevertheless, he stuck to his guns. He accepted the Empire but wanted dominion status for India. He was a devout Christian and a protesting Christian missionary. He complained bitterly about "god-forsaken" Bankura but clearly enjoyed mingling with the village people. A lover of nature he found joy, also spiritual solace, from cycling about in Bankura's countryside. An entry in his unpublished "Diary Leaves" of 9th June 1911 reads as follows, "Cycled out far further afield than I have ever done yet; came to an iron bridge above a rocky, deep-cut stream (no water in it), which reminded me of Roslin Falls. The country was well wooded & really beautiful; I passed through further villages, where many pigs were kept. Returning, so splendid was the sunset that I had often to stop; I sang many hymns, chiefly 'O God, how good, how great art thou (that is as I gazed at the sunset)…"

Nature and literature sustained Edward Thompson in his struggling Bankura days. He wrote a lot of his own poetry from there. He translated into English Ramprsad Sen's Bengali Sakta lyrics with Arthur Marshman Spencer. He found his feet in Bengali society by actively befriending Bengali litterateurs. He came close not just to Tagore but also to Sarat Chandra Chatterji and translated some of their work with passion. He retained an abiding interest in modern Bengali literature and kept in touch from England with the 'Parichay' and 'Kabita' groups of Calcutta. In turn he was respected as a literary critic by some of the young and rising writers of Bengal like Sudhindranath Dutt, Buddhadeva Bose, Amiya Chakravarty, Pramatha Bisi. This important and sympathetic biography provides much of this information from various archives (the Tagore Archives cited should be Rabindra Bhavana, Santiniketan, *not* Rabindra Sadhana, Calcutta). Even then one misses in these pages a feeling for Edward Thompson's quest. One senses that the biographer could not get underneath Thompson's skin.■

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A Grand Narrative of Sibling Bonding

Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn

BEFORE FREEDOM : NEHRU'S LETTER TO HIS SISTER
Edited by Nayantara Saghal
HarperCollins Publishers, 2000, pp. 500, Rs. 395.00

The temporal range, from 1909 to 1947, of this collection of letters from a "loving brother" to a sibling eleven years his junior, covers the period of Jawaharlal Nehru's apprenticeship for the role of India's first Prime Minister, and thus forms a part of the hagiographical cult surrounding that charismatic figure. Yet, when placed alongside the collections of letters from Nehru to his father, to his mother and to his daughter, this recent publication of Nehruvian correspondence is distinguished by the fact that they document Nehru's letters to none lesser person than "Nan", the 'sister of his heart' (with due apologies to the perpetuator of this title). It soon becomes obvious that this handsomely bound volume, designed as it is to display the colours of the national flag to its best advantage, seeks to conflate the public image of Nehru with his fraught private life. In her introduction, the second of "Nan's" daughters, the renowned writer and publicist, Nayantara Saghal, makes no bones about her agenda as editor; writing of the deliberate erasure of her mother's close relationship to her brother, she clearly states that, "In the absence of any other commemoration of a brother's bonds with his sister", it had "seemed important" to her "to bring the letters he wrote to her to light" (p.9). As editor, Saghal prefaces each section with a series of excerpts culled from the letters that are to follow and these she skilfully weaves into the *grand narrative* of the overriding love which existed between the two siblings. Thus, her introduction to Part Two opens with a letter written from her mother to her uncle in the wake of her having left Anand Bhavan as a new bride. The postscript, "Kiss Indu from me. I can see her dear little face and almost hear her sweet voice calling me", cannot but fail to poignantly reverberate in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's creation of what Saghal calls the "yawning blank where my mother had once been". Yet her rejection of her aunt on coming to power could be seen to merely continue the process of mutual rejection initiated in 1949 by Nan Pandit, the Indian Ambassador to the United States, who, by ignoring her niece's presence as part of Nehru's party, effectively cut her off from participating in any official function. Ever since Pupul Jayakar's biography of Mrs. Gandhi, Nehru household history has taken on the almost Lear-like hues of Shakespearean tragedy. In this version, Nan is made out to be the Goneril of the piece, her sister, Krishna Hutheesingh appears as a female Kent and Kamala is the wronged Cordelia; Nehru as a precocious Lear is, as always, blind to Kamala's true colours and it is left to Kamala's daughter and immediate heir to prove to him the greatness of her example. Indira Gandhi's ruthlessness later as a political leader is even traced to her having had to defend her mother against her aunt.

There is, therefore, the likelihood of this volume being read for reasons other than interest in Nehru's skill as a correspondent, this having been amply documented by similar collections. One of the main points of curiosity which this edition could be thought to satisfy, even though it forms but Parts Two and Three of its seven sections, is the nature of Nehru's references to his sister regarding Kamala. Without wanting to cut too fine a point about it, let it suffice to say that little can be found to support those who set Nan up as a rival to her sister-in-law. Nehru consistently writes of Kamala's fortitude—except when faced with the prospect of his frequent trips away from her bedside—yet, it is striking that she seldom forms anything other than the footnote to the general body of his letters. If anything, his references to her verge on the dutiful.

The other feature which is striking in this volume is the apolitical tone of Nehru's communication with his sister. While he consistently approves of her projects, her election to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces in July 1937, and her term as minister of local self-government and public health till 1939 and again from 1946 to 1947, is commented on at first facetiously in his congratulatory telegramme, and later subsumed under his concern for her to be distracted from personal problems. Her Presidency of the All-India Women's Conference from 1941to 1943 and the founding and Presidency of the All-India Save the Children were ventures he admired more, but on the whole his attitude to her political career was rather condescending.

Her brother's judgement (15 June 1945) as a reader of her recently published prison diary can perhaps be instrumentalized towards a conclusive view on this collection of his letters.

He writes: "But what I rather missed was a background of the dramatic events that had taken place and were taking place in the country then". Perhaps Saghal's volume is too lengthy; perhaps it really is too personal a matter to be suitable for publication. We learn more than enough of the details on which Nehru's mind could concentrate, he not only asks for "Father's brown overcoat" to be sent immediately halfway across the globe to him "c/o Thomas Cook", but also deals meticulously with household accounts, the posting of complimentary copies of his books to friends and new acquaintances. Nehru had criticized Nan's efforts as a diarist thus: "when you publish anything you must be judged by another standard". The standard Nayantara Saghal has set herself for this publication is doubtless commendable, yet ultimately, despite its voluminosity the material to hand is, like Nan's diary found to be "rather thin".■

Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn is Professor of English Literary and Cultural Studies at Universitat des Saarlandes, Germany.

Death Be Not Proud

Shobhana Bhattacharji

OONA, MOUNTAIN WIND
By Jasjit Mansingh
Bluejay, an imprint of Shrishti Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 487, Rs.395.00

Oona and her daughter Ilya died of mushroom poisoning in August 1996. We began to hear of her illness from the moment she was hospitalized. We didn't know her but we seemed to know several of her friends, all of whom were shattered by the death of this young girl and her daughter. Some months ago, Laila Tyabji loaned me her copy of *Oona, Mountain Wind* written by Oona's mother a few years after the tragedy. The thought of reading something like this was not nice. The cruellest suffering for a parent is to lose a child. No matter how old the child is, or whether the death is sudden or comes after a long illness, there is – possibly – no comparable grief. Jasjit Mansingh's book confirms this.

Weaving back and forth in time from some months after Oona's death to her wedding to her babyhood, her college days and so on, Ms Mansingh conjures up the vibrant personality of her daughter who, like many graduates of Delhi's elite colleges, went on to study management. Oona's time at IRMA wasn't just training in rural management. She became committed to it, found a man who shared her ideals, set up home in the UP foothills, and was beginning to become frustrated and exasperated with the stumbling blocks in the way of fulfilling her ideal to the extent that she wanted to give it all up when she died. An expert in mushrooms, Oona had always been careful about eating them but this time any number of factors seem to have operated leading to the deaths of mother and daughter. Like many others, the writer wonders what if one or the other of these factors had not occurred, would her child and grandchild be with her still?

If one were to separate the different strands of this book, they would be the reconstruction of Oona's personality, how and why she died, and how her mother coped with her double loss. Oona's papers and letters, condolence letters from friends and relatives, Oona's grandmother, father, brother, and especially Vedanta, helped her find her balance.

The mother coping with her loss is what the book is really about and occupies the largest space. It is the most personal part of the narrative, raw with emotion. That is what makes it especially difficult for a reviewer to say that it is also the book's weakness. There is of course the question of the propriety of using her daughter's personal papers when they have not achieved the status of historical documents but are—to stop beating about the bush—in the realm of gossip for those who may be on the fringes of Oona's circle. But even if we allow that the writer has been discreet in her use of this material, the book is surely meant for readers who are used to certain narrative conventions, among them that the elements of a narrative should be there for a purpose. In this book, however, people float in and out without contributing to the story of the three women — mother, daughter, granddaughter – who form its core. The narration veers from addressing the reader to addressing a departed and beloved daughter, but once again, the shift in style seems without purpose.

The first portion of the book where Ms Mansingh describes Ilya's funeral and the harrowing few days in the ICU watching Oona slip away are powerful and moving. The events dominate over the words and style whereas in the later parts, especially towards the end, the reverse happens. This is not to suggest that the book is insincere. Its sincerity is never in doubt. Perhaps the narrative alters in keeping with the changed rhythms of emotion in the months and years following Oona's death. Nevertheless, some editorial tightening would have the requisite impact on readers who did not know Oona or her family and friends.■

Shobhana Bhattacharji is Reader at Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi.

BOOK NEWS BOOK NEWS

Modern Indian Poetry in English by Bruce King with its social and publishing history of poetry as well as its chronology of major events and writings, has established the canon of significant Indian poets.
Oxford University Press (Revised edition) 2001, first published 1987, pp. 416, Rs. 595.00

Masnavi : A Study of Urdu Romance by Anna Suvorova focusses on love adventure poems written in northern India in the 17th-19th centuries and on genre-related narratives in Hindi, Punjabi and Sindhi.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000, pp. 291, price not stated.

The Picador Book of Cricket edited by Ram Guha celebrates the best writing on the game and includes many pieces that have been out of print.
Picador, 2001, pp. 476, price not stated.

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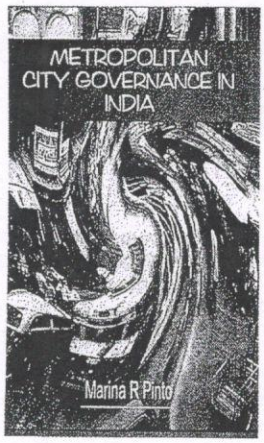
A Very Necessary Study

Snehanshu Mukherjee



METROPOLITAN CITY GOVERNANCE IN INDIA
By Marina R. Pinto
Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 242, Rs. 395.00

Given the dismal state of our cities, it is surprisingly, only of late that public and media attention has finally turned to their governance. The book under review, *Metropolitan City Governance in India* by Marina R. Pinto is indeed a topical one, especially to those concerned with the field of urban studies. The book, written by an academic (Ms. Pinto is a Professor of Public Administration at Mumbai University), seems to have been written keeping in mind the academic community. Even though the book has been structured from an academic standpoint, I would go further and recommend the book to city administrators, politicians and even to the inhabitants of the city—the citizens. The style of writing might seem tedious for a lay reader, which would be a pity because the issues involved are those that most affect the lay reader, (individuals or citizen groups) who need to participate in the political and administrative process to be able to demand better governance.

The book is structured into three parts. An examination of theoretical-constructs constitutes the first part; case-studies of the four metros form the second part; and a comparative analysis of the findings is the last and third part. The first part of the book starts with an overview of various theoretical frameworks suggested for local governance from the time of Aristotle to recent thoughts in the context of city management. The theoretical constructs discussed, though relevant, are chiefly from western standpoints. Indian theoretical frameworks are absent in this chapter and are discussed in the following chapter. Here, in the third chapter entitled 'Institutional Designs', the author moves onto a comparative study between different models of local governance in the U.S.A., U.K. and India.

Following this, the bulk of the book consists of case-studies of Madras (Chennai), Mumbai, Delhi and Calcutta (Kolkata). The case-studies show that each metro follows a different system of governance, the causes of which are traced through its historical evolution to its current status. The case studies are documented in varying degrees of detail; Mumbai and Delhi are the best recorded, while Kolkata and Chennai is comparatively less detailed. The author, through the case-studies, is successful in projecting the complexity of the dynamics of city administration, politics, governance and growth.

...the issues involved are those that most affect the lay reader, (individuals or citizen groups) who need to participate in the political and administrative process to be able to demand better governance.

At an overall level, one of the main findings brought to light in the book is the power struggle or conflict between local government and the state/central government, which has resulted in such poor governance and administration of the cities. The deteriorating infrastructure and derelict physical state of our cities has been the result of neglecting reforms in the governance structure. Reforms in the form of governance and administrative structure would have led to better cities. The reason for the absence of reform is analysed through the book. The author quotes Nehru to describe state-municipal relations as "authoritarian paternalism", and goes further to explain the current situation "... in terms of bureaucratic traditions dating back to colonial days and the reluctance of the state-level political elite to share power with the new local government centres".

The powers of the local municipal bodies are further negated by the creation of additional developmental agencies which often duplicate some of the existing functions of the municipalities and at the same time have a more important position in the hierarchy of decision making . The muddling of responsibilities between many different agencies responsible for the growth and development of the city has led to a situation where little is actually done in an organized manner for the city. The city continues to function and grow in an unplanned manner causing severe problems in the provision and upgradation of infrastructure. Strengthening the municipal government is probably the best option to generate a more functional city that could be headed towards a focused development goal(s).

The author describes a municipal government as "a peculiar combination of a government organisation which must also exhibit a business sense as it must run the system on sound business principles even if it does not subscribe to the profit motive". The function of a "good" municipality is to make the city "competitive" in relation to other cities in the state or the country, to provide business opportunities and attract investments. To do this the municipal government needs to create the right conditions within the city, through infrastructural upgradation and appropriate legislation and bye-laws.

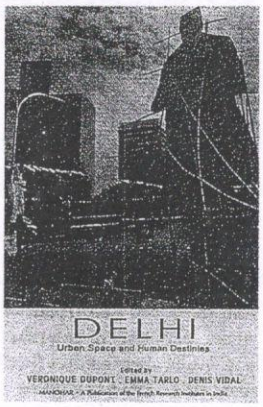
An example of such positive action can be seen at Bharuch in Gujarat, where the Bharuch Municipality, with its strained resources, was in the process of putting together a vision statement and implementation strategy in consultation with the citizen groups of both Bharuch and Ankaleshwar. In comparison, in Ahmedabad, the confusion between different agencies and power groups is all too apparent. It must however be noted that the scale of confusion in Ahmedabad is not that of the metropolitan cities compared in the book under review.

The municipal government is the equivalent of the Panchayati Raj of rural settlements, and represents "government at the door-step of the people". However, the existing municipal systems need change and overhaul towards an administrative structure that involves the people through their representatives. Decision making needs to be done through a people-oriented system that is marked by public accountability, openness and transparency. At the end of the book, the complexity of man-made situations can be theoretically reduced to simple axioms that could lead to a solution. To reach that stage in reality involves a healthy and active democratic process, a thing that *should* be possible, if anywhere, in our metro-cities. Here, as compared to the small towns, the ingredients to foster democracy, namely, levels of education and available resources should be the highest. This is the reason that this reviewer would once again urge everybody living in these cities to read the book and act in whatever way they can to create conditions for change.■

Snehanshu Mukherjee is a Faculty member of the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi.

Bridging Geography and Sociology

Stephen Legg



DELHI: URBAN SPACE AND HUMAN DESTINIES
Edited by V. Dupont, E. Tarlo and D. Vidal
Manohar, 2000, New Delhi, pp. 261, Rs. 475.00

Robert E. Park founded the Chicago school of urban ethno-sociology on the principle that the urban environment had to be studied in conjunction with the moral-cultural orders that were mapped onto it by its inhabitants. Over the last century these twin facets were separated as spatial scientists searched for 'objective' urban structures and sociologists hunted down 'subjective' accounts of life in the urban jungle. *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destiny* strengthens the bridge that is now forming between the estranged disciplines of, broadly, 'geography' and 'sociology'. Stressing the methodological focus of this book, the chapters are organized to begin with more specific, experiential foci, moving slowly toward more general observations. This is, however, a subtle jibe at the traditional framework of analysis, because each piece strives to overcome the category into which it was been placed. The interdisciplinary nature of the collected works allows a variety of readings to be made from this collection of fourteen chapters. As an exploration of another book within this book, it is interesting to explore the notions of scale and 'space' which emerge in this work as the outcome of the methodology adopted.

In their stimulating introduction, Vidal, Tarlo and Dupont highlight the disparity between the various emergent means of 'reading' the city and the comparatively static understanding of Delhi as a 'city of cities', an urban patchwork. In colonial historiography, this understanding was created as part of the mythology of a fragmentary and chaotic India into which the British could bring order. Plagued by invasion and internal decay, Delhi was united and saved by it's Frasers, Metcalfs and Lutyens. But ways of thinking are more difficult to get rid of than the people who thought them. Beneath and supporting the glorious facades of the Delhi Tourist Board have always been continuous but evolving traditions, economies, styles and practices. The urban structure of Delhi has to be complimented by an understanding of what ordinary people did there and how they accepted, rejected or transgressed the urban environment. However, the book constantly reminds us that the urge to personalize should not distract us from the constant pressures involved in Delhi's status as an important regional, national and international city. By looking at this interplay of external forces and internal responses through the four perspectives of economics, politics, urban environment and ethnography, a different set of conclusions and understandings can be highlighted from this work.

Philippe Cadéne shows how Delhi is situated in India's national urban framework. As the national capital, Delhi stands out in terms of its number of institutions, political parties, public sector companies and international organizations. Economically, it is overshadowed by Mumbai, but rivals Calcutta and Delhi has a strong showing in most economic sectors due to the strength of the northwest 'industrial corridor'. In addition to its regional and national connections, Delhi also has to be considered as a node in the international community of 'global cities'. In terms of air transport, international hotels, tourism and international conferencing, Delhi emerges as India's main portal to the outside world. Through marshalling regional and national capital, whether economic, cultural or political, Delhi can act as a link to the international market and community.

In stressing the economic importance of Delhi both nationally and internationally the traditional assumption of Mumbai as the centre of the economy and Delhi as that of politics is in part overcome. But how does the city do this, and what are the urban effects and forms that emerge in such a pressurized environment? Denis Vidal gives a skilful reading of the regional economy in Delhi, highlighting the social and cultural means by which economic flows are processed in the city. Through a study of Naya Bazaar grain market, which has connections throughout north India, the micro sociology of economic trading is delicately teased apart. The task of the market is to down-scale the massive volumes of stock into cognizable units. Entire stocks of grain are reduced to the size of a small sample that can be carried through the market and traded, not by the invisible forces of the market economy but by the audible and visible haggling of the market trader. It is at this moment and place of regional trade compression that the socialization of economics is made most transparent. The community is cross cut by gender, caste and regional identities that inflect the gestures and nuances of trading between these hoards of intermediaries.

In the realm of politics there is a similar refraction of wider processes showing that Delhi has to be seen as a regional as well as a national space. As the city of ministries, Parliament, and representative bodies from the Indian Union, Delhi again has to be considered as a microcosm of the national political geography. Yet V.B. Singh shows that in a city of constant flux and population exchange, we should not assume that Delhi's political geography is explicable either by national patterns or extra-regional affiliations. Education, occupation, ownership and caste hierarchies with their attendant economic aspects influence voting. Just as Delhi socializes its economics, so culture and business craft its politics. Another way Delhi is often misrepresented is as a mirror of certain national events with little influence of its own. Christophe Jaffrelot shows that post-Partition migrant influxes cannot completely explain the popularity of Hindu nationalism in Delhi. Before independence the city already had a thriving scene of Hindu nationalist parties which aggregated and ensured their popularity through links with the business community. These local links crafted and outlasted the turbulence of the late 1940s and ensured the regional nature of the capital's politics.

The contest and symbiotic relationship between extra and intra regional influences has long been recorded in Delhi's built environment. While patrons came and went with their grand projects, the deeper patterns of vernacular architecture fermented in the galis and mohullas of the urban fabric. A.G. Krishna Menon shows how the state has used architecture as a valuable tool in nation formation, mapping out visions of each "new India" in the hope that such forms would diffuse out from the national capital. Nehru's task in the 1950s was to combine the India of tradition with the secular, modern India of the constitution. The failure to reconcile these elements was represented by the revivalists and modernists schools who played out their fantasies on the Delhi plains. Menon skilfully combines different scales of building in his

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analysis of contemporary architecture, showing that although the state encouraged local architects, they were architects for the capital and not the region. One of the closest forms to a Delhi style is its own particular variety of what Bhatia has termed 'Punjabi Baroque'. This phantasmagoric flowering of residential architecture eclectically blends and morphs styles from all periods and regions. As a sometimes vulgar display of conspicuous consumption, often illegally built on protected land, maybe this is the urban form most true to the Delhi of today?

Veronique Dupont has studied the nature of post Independence urban growth in her statistical analysis. Within the Delhi region, growth has been most marked in the periphery as the centre has, on average, deconcentrated. Land use and the price of land have pushed people from the centre while residential accommodation, employment opportunities and urban services have pulled people out. Various Delhi Development Authority (DDA) schemes have also aided the transition of those who could afford it. This process allowed not only the birth of urban baroque but also the colonization of the rural periphery by so called 'farmhouses'. These developments provide a link between the Delhi of finance and politics and the ecological and local Delhi, as big money enters small places. Anita Soni has shown that the state has often been officially and unofficially complicit in sanctioning these expansions as have the local rural elite who acted as intermediaries.

The Delhi that churns out state architecture, farmhouses, national politics and international finance is also the one that smothers and encroaches on traces of earlier Delhi's. Narayani Gupta confirms the Marxist idiom that men (and women, and the state) make their history, but under conditions inherited from the past. Valid 'history' is something that changes with each batch of intelligentsia. By the 1970s, after a period of rapid expansion, Delhi needed to retrench and sort out what was 'history' in its massive inheritance from the past. Shahjahanabad fared ill in the first assessment and was termed a 'notified slum', despite the Red Fort of national importance at its heart. Lutyens's Delhi was likewise initially condemned as 'kitsch'. However, it was protected because the Indian elite moved in as the British elite moved out, ensuring a degree of protection that the traders and Delhi families did not warrant in the old city. Thus, although Delhi may be a site for state investment, it is the local people and agencies that must struggle to define what becomes 'Delhi' and what should be fought for.

Satish Sharma presents an interesting take on this fight in his discussion of what is 'seen' in Delhi and the 'power of the gaze'. Official and market restrictions determine what is seen in the public realm and thus which spaces enter the popular consciousness. These are the places that become 'monumentalized' and further divert attention from the slums and squatter settlements. Sharma perhaps devotes a little too much time to his methodology and verges on an Althusserian form of psychological interpolation of state ideology through the medium of the press. However, the idea of 'landscape' as a way of seeing, rather than just a material form, is an important one; only when we look in different spaces in different ways will those places acquire the protection they, or at least the people in them, deserve. Having looked at the interplay between external and internal forces in the realms of economics, politics and urban form, it remains to look at the personal notions of space which solidify and rupture around the human flows in the city.

Dupont's statistical work re-emphasizes how important migrants are to the nature of post-Partition Delhi. Migrants born outside of Delhi constituted 62% of the population for the 1961-71 period (p. 235) and still 50% for 1981-91. While 47% of migrants were from Pakistan in 1951, by 1991 over two-thirds of the migrants were from neighbouring states. The majority of migrants are male, aged 15-29, less well educated than the Delhi population and attracted by the labour market. In her more qualitative chapter, Dupont begins to explain the complex notion of space that these human flows impart to the Delhi environment. In a level headed and sensitive approach an exploration is made of people's links back to village communities and economic decisions not to invest in the built environment. These features allow street dwellers to craft a life and space that is widely misunderstood by metropolitan societies. Houseless populations, 96% of which are from outside Delhi (p.106), export and import bodies, ideas and goods between rural and urban India. Friends or relatives often form the point of access to the urban environment and once in Delhi trips are made to the village for religious or family ceremonies. Thus, within the broad trend of 'migration' there are a variety of spaces that are forged on arrival in Delhi. Houseless populations are often mobile and transitory, which grants them a degree of freedom not allowed to those who invest in some form of dwelling.

Saraswati Haider has examined the condition of people staying in *jhuggi-jhonpri* (hutment) colonies. These unplanned and unsanitized spaces contain crosscutting social spaces of gender, caste and occupation. What Haider shows is that Delhi is more a social 'salad bowl' than a 'melting pot'. Instead of being spaces of monotonous poverty, these are places of intricate social distinction and articulation which are often more oppressive than the villages people left. Threats of demolition, water shortage and non-existent health care are compounded miseries for oppressed and abused housewives whose opportunities for work and relaxation are again limited by the caste of her fellow occupants.

In a third spatial rendering of migrant and slum populations, Emma Tarlo presents a stunning account of the Welcome Resettlement Colony. In distinction to Soni's farmhouse dwellers, many people have been pushed rather than pulled out of the centre of Delhi. The dislocation of the already dislocated created a fractured space through definitive events rather than a steady process. Slums were demolished and their inhabitants shifted out. Into the planned space of the colony poured the intra-urban migrants, in some cases allotted plots in return for their sterilization under Sanjay Gandhi's Emergency scheme. Over the next twenty years the planned space became a lived place, with markets and temples, though the Sikhs gradually moved out of the colony after the 1984 assassination of Mrs Gandhi. Tarlo's work shows how intimidation, bribery and blackmail were all used in an attempt to create a planned space that could export the unwanted from the aesthetically regulated central spaces of Delhi. But despite the authoritarian methods employed at times, Welcome maintained a life of its own, just as the houseless and *jhuggi-jhonpri* dwellers craft their own lives onto the planned structures of the Delhi streets.

These studies remind us that when we talk about 'politics', 'space' or 'economics' we are simply talking about people, human bodies, at a reassuring and comforting level of abstraction. Beneath these reifications are people struggling to survive in liminal spaces at the margins of Delhi's flows, capital and monuments. This book is not without its faults. Sylvie Fraissard fails to comment or analyse sufficiently her collection of photographs, while Jaffrelot and Singh often struggle to surmount the mountains of data they present us with. However, in its wide ranging focus, the collection shows that Delhi is not entirely fragmented, but united by issues of regulation, homelessness and scale that must be addressed as issues not only of the capital, but a local and regional city with individual and human needs.■

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Kinship, Law and Social Change

Gopa Sabharwal

MATRILINY TRANSFORMED: FAMILY, LAW AND IDEOLOGY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY TRAVANCORE
By K.Saradamoni
Sage Publications and Alta Mira Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 176, Rs.175.00

In a largely partrilineal world, matriliny has always aroused interest. Matrilineal societies have been viewed as mirror opposites of the patrilineal world for here the women are in control and the husbands are only temporary residents in the homes of their wives. Matriliny like kinship systems in general has traditionally been studied by anthropologists, sociologists or jurists. Both sociologists and anthropologists focus on the nitty-gritty of the functioning of descent and alliance systems while the interest of the jurists centres on the puzzles of inheritance patterns.

Much of the literature on the subject by these specialists is not easily accessible to the lay reader since it abounds in jargon, kinship algebra and kinship diagrams. In this backdrop Saradamoni's book is a welcome addition to the literature on kinship. Not only does it cover both sociological and legal interests, being a book by a non-specialist, it is devoid of jargon and theoretical baggage which makes it easy to comprehend. Moreover it bridges an important lacuna in kinship studies—that of providing a moving picture of an institution to show how it changed due to social pressures and what it actually offered those who followed its systems.

The book has some other advantages that outweigh some of the descriptions of matriliny that abound in general texts on the subject. These tend to portray matrilineal systems like a well oiled machine, where no one questions basic principles and there are no issues of any kind within and between various segments of the descent group. Focusing on the Travancore region of Kerala, K. Saradamoni establishes at the outset that varied forms of matriliny prevail among different communities in the region. She shows how Nayar matriliny is not the standard type of matriliny as is commonly believed due largely to the fact that the Nayars figure prominently in descriptions of matriliny in Kerala.

She also establishes that most descriptions even of Nayar matriliny are not quite reflective of reality. At the ground level there are many variations within and between communities regarding residential patterns, controlling authority and division of land. She shows that women could live both within and outside their *taravad* (the Nayar joint family/ also the generic term in Malayalam for matrilineal household) and not lose their identity or right of maintenance for themselves and their children in it. She goes further to say that most descriptions of matriliny in Kerala by anthropologists are ahistortical. They tend to pertain to ideal type constructs and fail to account for either the changes in the matrilineal households of the nineteenth century nor its abolition in the twentieth century. She shows how other descriptions tend to overlook details regarding size and functioning of *taravad*s.

Another area where the author shows descriptions of matriliny to fall short pertain to the *karanavan* or the head of the household. Most contemporary accounts portray the eldest male in this role but Saradamoni shows that in earlier times it was actually the seniormost female who took on this role. The rights of women to be managers of their estates is shown to have been upheld also in courts of law. These roles changed with the coming of modern courts and British rule.

Anglo-Indian law redefined the *taravad* in important ways. They introduced a hierarchy of property rights and a legal definition of tenurial statuses. Moreover the courts coupled the recognition of the *taravad* as a corporate entity with the selection of a single individual with whom revenue could be settled, and the eldest male was selected as the single individual responsible for managing the property and making revenue payments. All of these greatly altered the internal structure of the *taravad* and its relations with external dependants.

It is these and other changes in the way matriliny was organized in the Travancore region in the nineteenth century that are the main focus of this book. Until then, matriliny as standardized provided some security to the women. They were regarded as belonging to a particular *taravad* and not as daughters or wives of particular men. No individual partition of *taravad* property was permitted. Nayar women entered alliance relations known as *sambandham* with men of their own caste or castes above theirs. The children born within the union belonged to the *taravad*. The *sambandham* relations could be terminated at the will of either partner and women who opted out of such relations were not looked down upon.

Exposure of people of the region to wider society and the influences of modern western education led to new ideas about society, family, and even gendered roles. Malayali men seemed uncomfortable with the fact that the *sambandham* was being equated by outsiders with concubinage, and their wives were being regarded as nothing more than mistresses and their children as bastards. Men who lived in *sambandham* relations were regarded as inferior and uncivilized. In fact, matriliny was viewed by many as being far inferior to patriliny, a belief that was strengthened by the idea that in all civilized societies women should be under the protection of men.

Nayar men, specially those from the upper strata began to demand reforms and laws. This demand according to Saradamoni was in keeping with their desire to establish their power in every sphere of activity including the family. The main areas in which reforms were sought were marriage, control and division of property and inheritance. The chorus for change also coincided with the establishment of a legislative body. An unofficial Bill to this effect was introduced in the Travancore Legislative Council in 1888 but without much success. The first Nayar Regulation was passed only in 1912. Three more comprehensive legislations were passed in the mid-1920s covering the Ezhava and the Nanjanad communities.

These legislations and the debates they sparked off are detailed in the book and make for interesting reading. These legislations brought about some drastic changes in social, familial and land relations. The biggest changes pertained to dissolution of marriage and the allowance of polygamy—both of which weakened the position of women. The latter provision was withdrawn in the Regulation of 1925.

Husbands became protectors and guardians of women. The reformers failed also to ascertain how many men were in a position to maintain a family or had independent property or wealth to pass on to them. This resulted in many men sending their wives to their *taravad* for part of the year or asking her to claim her share of the *taravad* properties. A major result of the legislative changes thus was the large scale division of property. It also resulted in a new inequality based on gender—only this one had the sanction of law.

In detailing all of these changes, Saradamoni looks not only at legislative debates but also at women's journals of the period and details some life histories too. She concludes that despite these changes matriliny did not die out. The matrilineal joint family was not replaced by a patrilineal joint family even though the conditions of the former were drastically altered. What did happen is that outside changes influenced this one institution drastically and defined the public space for men and the domestic space for women.

This book contains interesting ideas for future research and much food for thought for people who pursue research in the areas of kinship, law and social change. ■

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A Counsellor's Guide

Meena Gopal

THE INTIMATE SELF:A GUIDE TO WOMEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH
By Shelly Batra
Penguin, 2000, pp. 224, Rs. 250.00

In *The Intimate Self: A Guide to Women's Sexual Health*, Dr Shelly Batra has put to valuable use her wide and varied experience as a leading gynaecologist. The book is an informative account of a woman's sexual and reproductive body, including the health related problems she is likely to face.

The book begins with a description of a woman's physical sexual characteristics and organs, followed by an overview of the process of puberty. The chapters on contraception and sterilization provide information on how women could continue to be sexually active given the choice of contraceptives available and her own situation. Dr. Batra describes the various contraceptives in terms of their protective capacity as well as the conditions in which they should and should not be used, and the complications that are likely to arise. She proves herself to be sensitive and honest and yet not dogmatic in her recommendations. For example she is firm about recommending vasectomy rather than female sterilization, as it is a relatively safer and simpler procedure compared to tubal ligation, as much as she is emphatic about never advocating long acting pills or injectable hormonal contraceptives.

There are detailed and at times worrisome descriptions of the infections and diseases of the genital tract, including the instigating factors and the morbid consequences, all of which project women's vulnerability to infection. Despite the graphic presentations, the author almost always concludes on a tone of reassurance, "that most women have tremendous powers of resistance and can easily tide over these problems (p. 111)". There is an overwhelming tendency towards suggesting medical intervention as a solution to all problems. However the author is honest enough to admit that there are tremendous risks involved and however qualified the surgeon may be there can be irreversible damages.

The explanatory style is very lucid though it takes the form of a textbook at times. Dr. Batra's patience and sensitivity as a gynaecologist comes across in her numerous little anecdotes related to the women who came to her for a variety of problems. At times one feels that the book deals more with reproductive than sexual issues, due to the scant discussion on sexuality and sex education and the numerous chapters devoted to issues of contraception, sterilization, abortion, and infertility. Of course, due to the close relation between sex and reproduction, the information on contraception is quite invaluable. However, there is not much discussion on the politics and ethics of invasive contraceptive technologies or of consuming chemicals for contraception, neither are issues of power in sexual negotiation and contraceptive use between partners or of men seeking pleasure without responsibility which works against the interests of women, discussed.

One would expect that a book that is a guide to women's sexual health would devote more space on the understanding of pleasure, desire, friendship with one's own bodies, intimacy in relationships, as well as the social construction of sexuality, rather than a sketchy discussion in a section titled sexuality and sex education in the chapter on puberty, and under the misguided title of problems of sex and marriage.

While the title implies that the book would help a woman in the exploration of her body and in being comfortable with its dynamics, it tends to become a counsellor's guide rather than an intimate companion to a woman.

A preponderance of clinical terms which tend to objectify a woman's body and its conditions give an impression that any abnormality has to have a medical solution. Self-help and simple remedies do not find a place in the discussion.

As women cannot understand their bodies or relate to it outside of society's construction of women's sexuality and control over their bodies, the context of the creation and maintenance of power and control over women's lives is extremely important in understanding and caring for women's sexual health. While there does not seem to be any scope for a woman to have complete control over her body, she is made more dependent on the doctor. Useful yet related knowledge in this respect is found in the documentation of a self-help training experience titled *Na Shareeram Nadhi (My body is mine)* by Sabala and Kranti, which details women's understanding of their bodies, self-help and women's health, and the struggle for the rights over one's bodies and control over their lives. Another valuable book is *We and Our Fertility: The Politics of Technological Intervention* by Chayanika, Swatija and Kamaxi, that deals with reproduction and women, with a thorough review of the socio-political issues that underlie the control of women's bodies from the perspective of ordinary women's lives rather than that of the managers of health and population programmes.■

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Supreme Court A Secular Diety?

R. Venkataramani

SUPREME BUT NOT INFALLIBLE
Edited by B.N. Kripal, Ashok H. Desai, Gopal Subramanium, Rajeev Dhavan & Raju Ramachandran
Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 481, Rs. 650.00

Fifty years in the life of the Supreme Judicial Institution is a good period for stocktaking. The consumers of justice and their commonplace perceptions are factors to be reckoned with in any such evaluation. There are several dimensions and functional facets of the court itself which affect and concern different sectors of the society. Till recently, the court had not opened up its gates in any significant measure, to large segments of the citizens who deserved and needed its intervention most. The emerging industrial capitalist order and the well entrenched feudal hierarchies, could monopolize the court's jurisdiction under the common banner of threat to property rights as all too sacrosanct. Critical notes have been written on this part of the Court's history, though they are few. The preface to the book talks about the golden jubilee of the Court as an occasion for celebration and a critique of the court's work. Though the golden jubilee was celebrated with some fanfare it was not seized as an opportunity to do that critique which would involve the common person. One recollects what was written in a critical collection of essays on the occasion of the bicentennial celebration of the U.S. Constitution. ".....The bicentennial celebration of the U.S.Constitution was a bust. Despite the well-meaning efforts of many individuals and groups, the planned events simply failed to generate much enthusiasm..... that our constitutional legacy is better served by frank inquiry into these questions than by the formal rituals and patriotic platitudes recycled in most bicentennial events" [*Judging the Constitution*– Michael W. McCann, Geralald L.Houseman]. It is however gratifying that the book under review is an attempt to look at the "constitutional constellation which reflects no single era, and mirrors no single vision or philosophy ..... and of not altogether coherent compromises". To review the work of several contributors is different from looking at a single author's work. The varied subjects and their thematic emphasis, do present, it must be said, a common theme of sometimes reinforcing and sometimes conflicting ideals and visions.

Fascinating moments of history are caught by Granville Austin though he otherwise fails to analyse the key factors in the custody of the constitution, viz. the composition of the judiciary, the intrusive or overbearing shadows of the executive, the quiet manipulations of opinions and views far removed from public scrutiny, the influence of the press etc.

The overview of the court, presented by Gobind Das elegantly captures a whole history but narratives do not constitute history as E.H. Carr points out that no hard core of historical facts exist objectively and independently of the historian's interpretation. The piece concludes with the prevalence of myths around dispensation of justice and its doubtful claims to neutrality. One is not certain whether today the people regard the "Supreme Court as a secular deity and the Judges as Gods in secular form". It appears that the Court needs a resurrection of sorts to ascend to such a dignified position. The contribution by Lord Cooke of Thorndon on the Judges' cases relating to appointment of Supreme Court Judges, and transfers of high court judges and Chief Justices provides a vigorous and healthy glimpse of an outsider on the hazards of the unstructured and unguided primacy of the collegium of Judges in such matters. The current controversies and lack of transparency in regard to appointments to the High Courts and Supreme Court demonstrate the need for a thorough going review of the appointment process. The court has come a long way from Mathura (1979) 2 SCC 143 to "Vishaka" (1997) 6 SCC 241 and issues of dignity of women have been duly acknowledged by the Court as of prime importance to preserve and promote a sane culture. Several gaps and ambivalences in the sexual violence law have been closed and corrected. Indira Jaisingh is perhaps not wrong in canvassing for perspective changes on the whole sexual violence question. An all too male court have to shed its intrinsic values and attitudes. Two other contributors have presented a critical evaluation of some seminal issues which shaped the jurisprudence of the Court over a period and have a hold on the Court. The strength and weaknesses of the basic structure doctrine has been well captured, by Raju Ramachandran emphasizing the creative potential of democracy as opposed to fettering effect of the doctrine. The approach of the court on religious freedom, minority groups, and disadvantaged communities, has been critiqued and it has been suggested, and rightly so, that "the court must take religions as it finds them even if the claims made are unusual." The same logic it appears would apply to any group rights however unorthodox, unconventional or novel. While it is properly stated by Salve that the law to protect the environment is in itself a measure of social justice, and he presents a vivid account of the court catching up with the problem of environmental degradation, and the failure of the other institutions of governance, a critical account of how the environment cause has been ruthlessly pitted against the urban poor, the Adivasis and other disadvantaged sections which was necessary, is sadly absent.

Justice Michael Kirby, that great Judicial Comrade of Indian Jurisprudence, has given an enriching introduction to sharing of thoughts and ideas between the courts of India and Australia. He talks about the shared willingness of courts in India and Australia to develop their municipal law in general harmony with developments in international law. In tune with that assessment is the presentation by Claire L' Heureum-Dube, the Canadian Supreme Court Judge. The globalization of constitutional laws and the domestication of international human rights instruments, she propounds, are matters of promotion of a common denominator of understanding between judges of various jurisdictions. This common denominator of understanding should however be geared towards greater enhancement of the liberties and dignities of the poor, the disadvantaged and the service sector in the context of the emergence of globally articulated centres of power and the seeming erosion and dilution of domestic democracies. Such a common denominator of understanding will then integrate the concerns expressed by P.P.Rao about government employees and workers who need a clean, honest and transparent administration and who also owe to the nation a work culture, which is not rooted in welfare without results, and the critique of Atul Setalvad about the opportunities missed by the court to deal with the right to personal liberty, by applying some of the innovative techniques employed by the court in the area of socio-economic rights and the use of directive principles. But Setalvad disappoints us by not going into the dialectic relationship between vast contours of personal liberty and its wide ranging constituent elements which belong to the domain of civil, political, social, cultural and economic, claims, rights and needs. Sorabjee, who is always at home with his defence of the freedom of the press and freedom of expression as rights rooted in liberty, is at his best in tributing the court for its onward marches in protecting these rights. Censorship is anethama to the exercise of such freedoms, as infringement on the ground of law and order. But if definitions of obscenity, or indecent representation of women etc. are perilous exercises, are we to lean upon the fleeting values of a given time? Who bothers anyway about the expression, the privacy, and dignity rights of women of the underclass?

The emergence, growth and entrenchment of public interest litigation, as an integral part of the Superior Court's jurisdiction and practice is an integral part of the nation's history. Though it has acquired more clothes in its closet than designed by its founding fathers

Justices Krishna Iyer and P.N.Bhagwati, it undoubtedly is an instrument towards good governance and constitutional accountability. Ashok Desai and Muralidhar map a comprehensive survey of PIL and relevantly look into the controversies and criticisms against PIL, particularly the law and policy divide, the unpredictability of judicial responses and the need for judicial restraint ("the perception of an imperial judiciary making history"). Sir Stephen Sedley remarked elsewhere of the complex interplay of the jurisprudential, the intellectual, the political and the personal with no single predictable outcome to the average public law claim and appropriately quoted Engeli "a legal system has two often contradictory aims: to be visibly even handed and to serve the ends of the State." Close on heels, Andhyarujina provides a trenchant criticism of the court building the "due process" into the constitutional scheme despite its deliberate omission by the makers of the constitution. A voice of lament is seen on the expansion of Indian judicial power via PIL. A non-political analysis of law will necessarily reject the impure elements imposed on or acquired by the system which must work within checks and balances if not separation of powers. Reminiscences of the formative years of the Supreme Court Bench and Bar by B.Sen makes a delightful reading. It must however be said that the piece by J.B.Dadachanji (JBD) is disappointing. It lacks coherence and is more of a repetition of Gobind Das and R.S.Narula. There are serious editorial lapses; two paragraphs in Shri Narula's contribution are printed twice in pages 462 – 463.■

R. Venkataramani, an advocate at the Supreme Court, has published books and monographs in the area of legal studies.

Communication

Prasanta Pattanaik's review of M.C. Nussbaum's book, published in *The Book Review*, June 2001, is excellent. It is almost like an essay by itself, and very pleasant to read. I wish *The Book Review* may consider publishing independent essays on relevant contemporary topics. That will add an extra dimension to the good work you are doing in Indian context.

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Public Law and Its Institutional Framework

M.P. Singh

RULES, LAWS, CONSTITUTIONS
Edited by Satish Saberwal and Heiko Sievers
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 289, Rs. 350.00

INDIAN JUDICIARY: A TRIBUTE
By Poornima Advani. Foreword by Ram Jethmalani
HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp. xix + 244, Rs. 395.00

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES: LAW, PRIVILEGES, PRACTICE AND PRECEDENTS
by Subhash C. Kashyap
Universal Law Publishing Co., Delhi, 2000, Volumes 1 and 2, pp. xciii + 2710, Rs. 1975.00

The three books under review, though unconnected with one another, fall within the rubric of public law. They also deal with issues of general public concern.

The first amongst them is a collection of essays selected from the already published papers in the *Seminar* (1995) and from the papers presented in a seminar on "Constitutional History and Rule of Law" held at Bangalore in February 1995. The authors of the essays are mostly, but not exclusively, lawyers. Several of them represent such diverse disciplines as sociology, history, political science, computer science and epistemology. One of them is also a civil servant. Cutting across the academic disciplines a few of them are also social activists. They also represent at least three nationalities, British, German and Indian. Most of the authors are well known in their respective disciplines and even beyond.

The genesis of the essays lies in the ongoing debate on the deficiencies of the institutions and functioning of the Indian legal system and the increase of communalism and its possible effects on the constitutional foundations of the country. In view of these concerns the western model adopted in India has been reexamined in a comparative perspective.

Starting with the proposition that rules in general of which legal and constitutional rules are an important category, are sine qua non for organizing and running any society effectively and efficiently, the essays deal with issues such as the nature of rules, their connection with the rules of nature, rule of law in plural traditions, relationship between power and law, place of rules and laws in Indian traditions, relationship of rule of law with affirmative progammes, ground level administration of rules in tribal development, insanity in law, constitutionalism, homogeneity and constitutional democracy, compatibility of rule of law with personal laws, the rule of law and the changing position of the individual in England and Europe, and rule of law versus rule of man in China. Every essay reflects its author's serious engagement with the issues and a genuine concern for appropriate solutions. Therefore, every essay is absorbing and thought-provoking. A few of them compel us to rethink afresh about the existing conceptions of law, constitution and the rule of law. The collection is a well thought out, timely and useful exercise. It can be read with interest by anyone interested in the contemporary issues of any society, especially of India. If India is looking ahead for development and realization of its constitutional goals, it must undertake and repeat similar exercises and draw appropriate lessons from them. That alone is the path to social change along with the rule of law. The last of all the essays, 'Learning Law Outside Law School' is of special interest insofar as it draws attention to the precondition of knowing the rules for their effective following and implementation. A society like ours in which access to rules is scarce for so many reasons ingenious ways must be thought out for legal literacy and awareness. The essay describes the challenge undertaken and the remarkable work done by the Multiple Action Research Group (MARG) in this direction.

In paying her tribute to the Indian judiciary, Poornima Advani has selected for study nine contemporary but retired Chief Justices of India and Judges of the Supreme Court ranging from Chief justice Bhagwati to Chief Justice Venkataramiah and Justices V.R. Krishna Iyer and R.S. Sarkaria. No specific reason is given for the choice of these and not other Judges except that some of their judgments impressed the author and that "They were all great judges" and "are all great men." One chapter each has been devoted to these judges in their name with a subtitle. The subtitle denotes either the most outstanding contribution of the Judge to law or his personal qualities or public perception. She analyses a few of their prominent judgments and draws on the personal interviews she had the opportunity of having with each one of them. While obviously the judg-

ments discussed in the book are available in the law reports, many things that have surfaced in the interviews are revealing and would have remained unknown. To that extent the book brings special insights into the judgments and hints at the role of extra-judicial in the decision making emphasized by the realists and by the students of judicial process.

Ram Jethmalani's observation in his foreword that the duty of a judge is not "to coordinate with other branches of Government" but "always to be on the side of the citizen and confront and repel the insidious invasions of the citizens liberty and to protect his paltry belongings against the rapacity of the corrupt men in power" is notable.

Subhash Kashyap's treatise has a special relevance for our parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy is the bedrock of our legal and constitutional system and governance of the country. Its smooth and effective functioning is a precondition for the operation of the system. Such functioning can be assured only through a thorough understanding of the place of Parliament in our system, coining of appropriate rules and regulations for its operation, wise interpretation and application of such rules and regulations and easy accessibility to them for all concerned. Except coining the rules and regulations the treatise performs all other functions and is a reliable ready-reckoner on all matters of parliamentary practice and procedure. It is of immense value to the presiding officers and members of Parliament and State Legislatures and the officers of their secretariat, practicing lawyers, judges, researchers, students and everyone else interested in parliamentary practice and procedure.

The author with the distinction of having served all the Lok Sabhas from the first to the ninth (1953-1990) in different capacities, including that of the Secretary General for a long time, brings in all his experience and learning into the treatise. In his words: "The study and work-experience of a whole life time, have gone into this massive treatise" and the "actual preparation of the manuscript" consumed "more than a decade of grueling labour." Not only is the treatise a comprehensive reference manual on parliamentary processes and procedures it is also a commentary on the Rules of Parliamentary Procedure and statement of precedents as solutions for each developing situation.■

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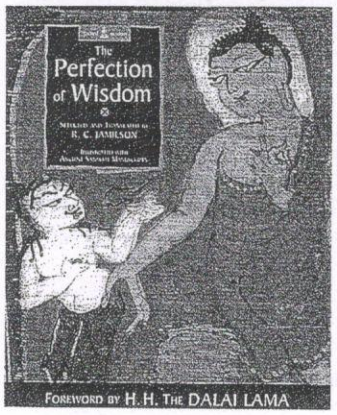
Essence of Gautama Buddha's Teachings

Bharati Puri

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM SUTRAS
Translated by R.C. Jamieson
Francis Lincoln, London, 2000, pp. 109, price not stated.



The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras represents the essence of the Buddha's teachings applicable to the modern reader as it was to the monks who studied the text two millennia ago.

Bewildering as it is, full of paradoxes and apparent rationality, the central idea of *The Perfection of Wisdom* is complete release from the world of existence; and it becomes clear that paradox and rationality are the only means of conveying to the reader the underlying intentions that would otherwise be impossible to express.

Going beyond earlier Buddhist teachings that focussed on the rise and fall of phenomenon to state that there can be no such rise and fall because phenomena are essentially void, *The Perfection of Wisdom* states that there is no multiplicity: all are one. Even existence (samsara) and *nirvana* is essentially seen as the same, since both are ultimately void. The view of *The Perfection of Wisdom* that words and analysis have a practical application in that they are necessary for us to function in this world, but in the ultimate analysis nothing can be predicted goes to show a philosophical point summed up below: "Our inclination is to analyze, to place things in philosophical categories, but in absolute terms, these categories are meaningless" (p. 47).

Offering a way to enlightenment, *The Perfection of Wisdom* represents the formal introduction to Buddhist thought of a partial ideal. This is the ideal of a *bodhisattva* or Buddha-to-be. Beings who achieve enlightenment but cannot pass on the means of enlightenment to others are known as *arhat* or *pratyekabuddha*. On the contrary, a *bodhisattva* should and does teach. Practising the six perfections: giving, morality, patience, vigour, contemplation and wisdom, the *bodhisattva* should place the maximum emphasis on wisdom which is considered the most important of these, as it dispels the darkness of sensory delusions and allows things to be seen as they really are.

Offering a way to enlightenment, *The Perfection of Wisdom* represents the formal introduction to Buddhist thought of a partial ideal. This is the ideal of a *bodhisattva* or Buddha-to-be.

Set in the community of monks at the Vulture Peak, Rajagrah (Rajgir in modern Bihar can be visited to this day), the text takes the form of a conversation circle.

Featured in this book are two manuscripts both produced during the reign of Mahipala I, the Pala King who ruled over what are now parts of Northern India and Nepal between 992-1042 A.D. While retaining the integrity of the original, this translation aims to express clearly and accurately the meaning of the original text in words that the modern English speaker would understand. There are detailed illustrations of these manuscripts. The primary purpose of the paintings was to protect the manuscripts and serve as objects of meditation. Even though they are astonishing for their sheer variety—R.C. Jamieson himself acknowledges that they do not relate closely to the text.■

Bharati Puri is a Doctoral student at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

For The Young Reader

MOUNTAIN SECRET

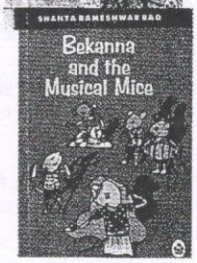
By Sumana Chandavarkar

BEKANNA AND THE MUSICAL MICE; SEETHU

By Shanta Rameshwar Rao

All books published by Gulmohar, Orient Longman, Chennai, pp. 105, 118, 156, Rs. 75.00, 90.00 and 55.00

Some people may call it a sign of courage, while others may think it is merely being a busybody, but these qualities can obviously be combined in a particular act! These three books between them show how people and animals can get together to punish a culprit , save a few lives, and help others in times which are sometimes tough. They are a part of a continuing series called 'The Gulmohar Series'.



All these books contain different views and moods of not just people but also animals! These include pleasure and sadness, love and hatred, boredom and fun. They tell you about relationships between children and children, between children and adults and most important (though not in all the books) between children and animals. I got the impression that adults do not have much of a relationship with animals.

Seethu is a book worth reading. It explains and illustrates the feeling of a rag doll that at one time was the favourite of a rich boy. As time passes, he becomes older, and the rag doll fades and is torn in some places. It becomes the sole source of happiness of the gardener's granddaughter Rami. To the people of her own and the surrounding villages the gardener's granddaughter was "a bad luck child". Her mother had died at childbirth, and her father was soon killed in a war. Illwill towards the baby began to flare up due to more tragedies in the village. As Rami was still a baby she could not realize that she was an orphan. All she could do was wave her legs around .

She was soon sent to the city and brought up by her grandfather, who took responsibility for her. She grew up a kind and understanding child. During this period she was given the rag doll that could be talked to, and all secrets could be poured out to. This story describes the friendliness that develops between the gardener's granddaughter Rami and the master's son Anand. My favourite person is Rami, who has the reasons for, and answers to all difficult or easy situations!

As an avid reader of fiction of all kinds, I can say from my experience that this book is excellent for children of age 10 and above. Friends, this is a book that tells us about the trouble taken by a person to help his or her friend. Instead of showing the difference between two backgrounds (the gardener's and the master's) it merges two different situations in life into a story that has been written beautifully.

Mountain Secret is another tale of two girls who muster up the courage to make friends with one another even though they are very different from each other. Chunni loved nature and lived in a family of five. During one of her expeditions she meets a young Tibetan girl, Pema. While Chunni first tries to make friends, Pema is hostile and runs back to her family . But soon they learn each other's languages and become good friends. They meet Pema's friend Dolma who is in serious trouble. Both try to help Dolma when they see the fear in her eyes. They also discover an uninvited visitor in their family cave who occupies it and refuses to leave (of course he does not know about their presence). They soon learn about a big secret from their friend Babaji. They are able to track down not only villains but also spies!

My favourite person in this story is Munna who is like me, always looking for trouble. This is a very imaginative story that has been put together well. I really do congratulate the author Ms Sumana Chandavarkar. The illustrations by V. K. Bhooer are very good too.

Bekanna and the Musical Mice is a book that contains all kinds of stories. It may be courage, greed, kindness or sociability . The first story is about a family of mice Appu,Tippu,Vittu,Kittu and Champa. They become famous due to the fact that they are good performers. But they remain out of reach of a particular greedy cat who is not only greedy, but witty and dishonest! You have to read the book to feel the thrills of their adventures. The second story is about the stories recalled by a grandmother when she was young. She tells a particular story many times, as it is the children's favourite (the one about how she was lost in her village). The third story tells us about a duck that loses one of its wings and cannot fly away with its family to warmer places when it becomes cold. It is really very well written. Other stories tell us about how an imaginary cat feels lonely, about ogres trying to destroy a family, and even about magical vines that make a family rich!

These stories are full of imagination, and really thrilling. They all have exciting plots and characters and are suitable for children of 10 and above. There are twists and turns which always surprise and delight you, and they are quite unlike any other series which I have read. **These books are specially for children and adults should not be allowed to read them.** The reason is that a few mastermind adults have written books in the way children see the world and there are secrets in them that children should be allowed to keep!

Shirali (14)

THE GIANT WHO LOOKED FOR HIS TEMPER

By Santhini Govindan. Illustrations by Jagdish Joshi

Scholastic India, 2000, pp. 32, Rs. 50.00

NEENA'S GRANNY

By Vinita Krishna. Illustrations by Sujasha Dasgupta

Scholastic India, 2001, pp. 12, Rs. 35.00

Boomba the giant had not just a huge body like all giants—he also had a huge temper, and he was always losing it! He lost it at small things – if he wore his shirt inside out if his alarm clock did not ring at the right time, if his socks got mixed up. So he was a silly but scary giant, and did not have any friends. He was lonely on his birthdays, with no one to share his birthday cake. He needed help to look for his temper, but none of the animals whom he asked for help knew what the temper looked like, and they could not help him find it. In the end, he did not find his temper, but did find lots of friends.

I liked this book as Boomba finally found friends. But I think it would be better if he never found his temper, so that he can never lose it again!

Neena had a granny who loved her dearly. She had taught her to walk and to talk when Neena was a baby. Neena also made her proud when her first word was not 'mama' or 'papa' but Grrrranny!

One day Granny fell ill, and when she came back from the hospital, Neena was scared to find that she could not talk, nor walk, or smile any more. The doctor was not even sure whether she recognized any one. What Neena did was to repeat with Granny everything that Granny used to do when she was a baby. And she ended up making Granny walk and talk again!

I did not much like this book. Though I am happy that Neena did manage to make her Granny walk and talk again, I wish Granny had remained Granny, and not become a baby.

Rushika (8) (with Meena Radhakrishna).

BATTLING BOATS; GRINNY THE GREEN DINOSAUR

Selected by Vijaya Ghose. Edited by Rosalind Wilson
Katha & A Rosalind Wilson Book, 2000, pp. 110 & 102, Rs. 75.00 each

Young readers of *Target* magazine have two more exciting volumes to add to their collection. Spine-tingling adventure, fun, mystery, escapades galore—all this and more has been packed into these third and fourth volumes of stories by inimitable storytellers. Designers and illustrators Suddhasattwa Basu, Arvinder Chawla. Tapas Guha have pooled their talents for Geeta Dharmarajan in this ongoing tribute to Rosalind Wilson's genius for creating a magic world of fantasy for the young reader.

A suggestion for Geeta Dharmarajan! A Gift Pack of the four volumes in expandable cartons to accommodate others in the series would solve the problem for many a seeker after birthday/Christmas presents for young relatives and friends.

CONTRARY BEAR

By Phyllis Root. Pictures by Laura Cornell
Scholastic Inc. 1996, Rs. 60.00

For ages 3-6, this little tale is of the bear who is the cheerful scapegoat for the tantrums of a wilful little girl. The author has many picture books to her credit—*Sam Who Was Swallowed By A Shark, Coyote and The Magic Worlds.* The tale is scrumptiously illustrated by Laura Cornell. The fact that this edition is being marketed by Scholastic only through the school market explains why a five-year old publication is being sent for review now.

NO, DAVID

By David Shannon

THE LOVABLES IN THE KINGDOM OF SELF-ESTEEM

By Diane Loomans

A BOOK OF FRIENDS

By Dave Ross
All from Scholastic Inc., 2000, Rs. 70.00, Rs. 60.00 & Rs. 60.00

Three well-illustrated picture books from Scholastic priced at Rs. 60.00 each are designed to interest young preschoolers. Yes is a wonderful word but it doesn't keep crayon off the living room wall, as the author admits. So it is that each child has to live with the familiar 'no' every step of one's growing up years. A remake of the book made by the author as a young boy, the text is illustrated with drawings of David doing all sorts of things he wasn't supposed to do. As an adult, I wondered, if we learnt not to use the word no so often, would it take the zing out of a child's life—would being naughty lose its fun if Mummy did not always say 'No' David, Barbara, Anusha, Rishi...what have you?

The colourful illustrations by Kim Howard notwithstanding *The Lovables*, even as a read-aloud, feels forced and artificial—in fact 'precious'. An example? *'Whether you are big or small/You are the greatest gift of all./Now that you're part of our Lovable Team/We'll always hold you in high esteem:'*

Friends come in all different sizes and shapes and colours.... is what *A Book of Friends* tells you. How dull it would be to have no one to call 'My friend', to hug, to play with, to quarrel and make up with! The illustrations by Laura Rader are bubbly with the joy of living.

COPING WITH FRIENDS

By Peter Corey. Illustrated by Martin Brown
Scholastic Inc., 2001, Rs. 80.00

Coping with Friends by Peter Corey, another book on friends, again from Scholastic priced at Rs. 80.00. All of us realize that friendship is a complicated, confusing and often painful affair. Here's a book which gives you tips on bossy friends, mad friends, odd friends, from deadly enemies to bestest chums. Along with the book you get a Friendship Train Game free. Illustrated by Martin Brown in black and white.

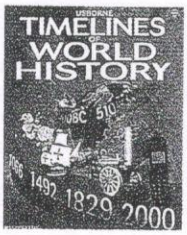
SIMPLE WONDERS: TOY STORIES TO MAKE AND TELL

By S. Paramasivam & Cathy Spagnoli
Tulika, Chennai, 2001, pp. 46, Rs. 80.00

Folk toys—ingenious, fun, resourceful—provide rich material to the two authors of this well-crafted book for the eight year olds and above. Stories to read and toys to make—a bonanza for the child, the teacher and the parent. Many a rainy day could be turned into fun and creativity with this book. A professional story teller in the computer age, Cathy, married to the well-known sculptor Paramasivam together weave magic through words and hands and Tulika comes up with a winner again.

USBORNE TIMELINES OF WORLD HISTORY

By Jane Chisholm
Scholastic Inc., 2000, price not stated.



If you want to know when the wheel was invented, Shakespeare was born, or the first man landed on the moon, you will find it in this densely illustrated reference book. With over 3,500 dates, it is an indispensable guide to what happened when and where.

Timelines of World History outlines the history of the world, pointing out the most significant landmarks and turning points—wars and revolutions, ground-breaking inventions and discoveries, artistic movements, and the rise and fall of great empires—from the earliest settlements of around 9000BC right up to the end of the 20th century.

Chanda Chari

Thank Goodness There are Originals

Sudhakar Marathe

MAPPING THE POSTCOLONIAL
Edited by Vinayak Chaturvedi
Verso/New Left Review, 2000, London, pp. 364, price not stated.

An excellent introduction by the editor, in some sense the best piece in the collection, begins with the following claim: "This book 'maps the terrain' of the Subaltern Studies Project of writings on South Asian history and society." This sentence is typical of the volume in one sense—that it feels the need to put quotation marks round a perfectly commonplace phrase (maps the terrain). There is a great deal of mystification about such studies, for they seem generally unable to clothe thought in accessible language. This is one reason for not attempting here any sort of summary of the pieces included in the volume, the other being that the introduction serves the purpose excellently.

This sentence is also atypical in one sense—that one may not find too many such simple and direct sentences in the volume. There may be an unintended fundamental irony in the use of complicated language to write, post-modernly and post-colonially, about the subaltern. This introduction may, therefore, be the best piece for the reason that it provides for the reader a succinct history of the movement itself.

Indeed, ironically enough, the zeal of the academy abundantly manifests itself in the papers included in this volume. Time and time again one is left wondering where the subaltern has gone in the involved and dense expression typical not only of this movement but of many recent movements. Still, adherents of these same movements complain about the tyranny of the *logos* and yet submit to it with vengeance. To be fair, nowhere does the volume indicate that ordinary readership is its object.

Yet other signs also point the same way. For instance, the substantial introduction itself runs only to 8 pages; in much smaller print but actually of the same volume are the notes appended to it. Or look at the mantra-like jugglery involved in reading just the title of one paper—'Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the (Re-) Emergence of a (Post-) Modernized (Middle) Peasant'. There *are* delightfully simple titles here as well, for instance 'The Nation and Its Peasants'. By and large the writings represented all suffer from over-absorption with *logos*.

This linguistic trap does not constitute the only substantive problem with the papers in this volume—for right at the outset appears the claim regarding South Asian "history" without delimiting the domain or extent of the term. Couched in this usage is the other major problem with subaltern thinking as far as one can make it out from this volume (and the preceding volumes in the series). The problem concerns what can only be called the presumption that subaltern phenomena occurred only during the latest series of western colonizations. The good thing is that at least some of the writers represented in the volume raise the same or similarly serious questions about the subaltern enterprise (e.g., C.A. Bayley's 'Rallying Around the Subaltern').

Not taking the long view of South Asian history may also exact another heavy price, that of neglect of the composition of South Asian societies growing slowly over millennia by a series of both peaceful and less than peaceful occupations by a number of different peoples and cultures from within the region. These interventions not only have their own extended colonial history and lasting effects but also their own subalternizations of (usually) the indigenous peoples. Signs of these interventions that occurred prior to western colonization are evident everywhere in South Asian life, even in recent (often awful and bloody) struggles in the region in which one tribe seemed bent on eliminating another.

One reason for such problems with subaltern studies and much of this volume seems to be the distance, virtually disjunction, between subaltern theory and subaltern existence. It appears that the subject has been gobbled up by the (not merely) reflexive but self-absorbed scholarship in the field.

There is, therefore, the subaltern, apparently living his subaltern life in subaltern conditions inarticulately enough to require highly articulate and 'other' spokespersons; and there is the well-meaning yet limiting absorption of the scholar with 'isms' and theories instead of with the conditions of subalternly existence.

Yet in recent decades at least in India the subaltern has been writing, always poignantly, sometimes with rhetoric effective enough to make the non-subaltern, educated, middle-class, metropolitan reader sit up and take notice. But the subaltern has always spoken, throughout history. And at times others have spoken for him, about his condition and of the nature of his inexorable oppression. Indian spiritual literature written in many cases *by* subalterns—in languages such as Marathi, Hindi and Kannada, especially in distant eras pre-dating western colonization—provides enormous quantities of such evidence.

Subaltern studies do seem to suffer from this problem of not looking widely enough for indigenous evidence and sifting it before theorizing about it. One feels like saying, "Reader, beware!"

Having suggested that the book may not be meant to be read by ordinary readers, it must be pointed out that, as part of the current process of willing subjection to post-colonial colonization, unsuspecting ordinary readers such as research scholars and non-metropolitan professionals in academic institutions do take notice of such writing. Unfortunately, by and large, this readership has very little notion of either the long stretch of human history, the defining characteristic of which has been colonization, or of the history of the 'Old' Left (let alone the 'New' Left), of philosophical theories that are meant to form the bedrock of subaltern (and other post-modern and post-colonial) theoretical formulations, or of their genesis in the cultures and historical moments of the originators of those formulations.

What is definitely alarming is that much of this readership has very little notion of what a peasant is or was, what marginal farming and undependable labour (even currently existing bonded labour) is, what constitute the actual daily and perpetual conditions of the subalterns' lives. They have practically no notion of the indigenous peoples of India itself, let alone of such peoples in other parts of the world. They have no historical awareness of the treatment of such peoples by a great variety of colonizers—for instance, the way indigenous peoples of central (eastern or western) Africa were treated by Arab traders and colonizers before westerners appeared on the scene.

Yet such thoroughly unprepared readership has begun to bandy about terminology adopted by Subaltern Studies, without feeling the need to root itself even in Indian history. It has begun to argue on the basis of more or less superficial appreciation of the careful arguments of the original and serious proposers of subalternism.

Thank goodness, therefore, that there are originals. One finds these days so much second-hand, "appropriated", or even hijacked material and so-called ideology, especially in junior level scholarly work attempted in Indian universities and regularly published in our journals by persons who are themselves "sukha-vastu", or genuinely well off, compared to the subaltern elements of our own society. So much goes by the name "subaltern" with so little inherent compulsion.

Either vague and unrealized guilt motivates such work or it is band-wagonism at its worst, with little or no justification in the experience of the scholar, without personal knowledge or understanding of the circumstances of the real life of subaltern people. Nowadays, so virulent is this tendency to adopt ideology, any ideology, that a *caveat* of basic humility on account of

ignorance seems definitely called for.

Significantly, such a *caveat* was given, in a different context but for the same reasons, by an author who was the *first* to write about subalterns of a kind and to actually use the term. Yet just as significantly, the unwary secondary—I mean secondary and not genuinely derivative—practioners of subaltern studies in India despise the work of this writer virtually without bothering to read it:

> One of these days, this people. . . will turn out a writer or a poet; and then we shall know how they live and what they feel. In the meantime, any stories about them cannot be absolutely correct in fact or inference. ('His Chance in Life', Rudyard Kipling)

There have been subalterns as long as human society has existed. There is a certain narrowness about subaltern (and other) theory caused by neglect of this fact. This narrowness compounds itself in borrowed subalternism that completely misses this point. In fact one might go so far as to speculate whether subalternism is not indeed inevitable (***not*** justifiable) in the unending movements and migrations of human society. But at any rate to presume that the subaltern condition was a creation of either British or western colonialism is mere opportunism contrary to historical facts of the preceding millennia.

Yet to read subaltern theory superficially, without the least first-hand (which really only means second-hand for most of us) knowledge of subalterns in one's own country at large and specifically within one's immediate community, to adopt terminology cavalierly and apprehended principles only foggily understood, has become common practice in today's scholarly world here. Original subaltern writing, like the papers included in the present volume, is difficult to read and difficult to comprehend. It is even more difficult to fit into the context of one's actual life if one is not a subaltern (which is why especially the aboriginal or indigenous subalterns of India resent intervention by highly educated urban mediators).

Thank goodness, therefore, that there are extant originals of this approach, such as find place in the present volume, whose thinking is genuinely motivated by some understanding of the condition of being subaltern, by their own readings of history, whose arguments are highly involved but internally consistent and historically sound and responsible at least as far as they go. Such work is worth reading, therefore, for a number of good reasons, but part of Polonius's advice to Laertes seems worth repeating in this context—"neither a borrower nor a lender be." For reading these erudite, dense and demanding papers about mapping or re-mapping subaltern studies will require the reader to map himself at the same time with extraordinary rigour and honesty. It is not clear whether the contributors to the present volume can read the map they have made.■

Sudhakar Marathe is in the Department of English in the University of Hyderabad.

Inequilibrium Makes the Difference

Wagish Shukla

ACHANAK HUM PHIR
By Nemichandra Jain
Bharatiya Jnanpeeth, 1999, pp. 188, Rs. 115.00

GANGATAT
By Gyanendrapati
Radhakrishna, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 159, Rs. 150.00

DO PANKTIYON KE BEECH : POEMS
By Rajesh Joshi
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 110, Rs. 125.00

SAMAY KE PAAS SAMAY
By Ashok Vajpeyi
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 80. Rs. 125.00

At 81, Nemichandra Jain is probably the seniormost active Hindi writer today. He started his career with *Tarasaptak* (The seven notes at the highest pitch), published in 1944. This was a collection of poems by seven then young writers who were anxious to start a new age in Hindi writing. This new age defined its 'newness' in terms of a political identity for the poets as against merely a poetic identity. Thus whatever freshness was present in the poems was to be explained in terms of the new role for the poet, who was a herald by definition. Like all heralds, these poets also were not subject to people's scrutiny and their novelties were sacrosanct by default. Therefore, infirmities in language, metric structures and emotional tautness are all to be ignored because of the evangelical message; the medium was no longer important. This was not exactly a fresh idea, since Hindi poetry was under a reformist spell for some time, but distinctly political affiliations were for the first time claimed to be integral components in a poet's making.

Since then, the hypotheses have not been seriously challenged. Poets continue to expect admiration for their commitment to noble causes. Critics continue to examine writers for the extent of their adherence to particular political jargon and rate them accordingly. The output is predictable: an average performance marked by a rarely different flash.

This is the general state of Hindi literature today. Nemichandra Jain's book of poems, *Achanak Hum Phir* (Suddenly we are here again), a collection which contains his output of sixty years of poetic work, does not depart from this noticeably. Even in sceptical poems like *vyakhya* (explanation), or poems on a cultural signture like the temple of *Konark*, the basic virtue of single layer communication has not been lost sight of so that free play for poetry is not allowed and one has the feeling of a Sahir or Faiz element of directed writing dominating the observations. The kind of reading of Tulasidas that was reflected in his 1948 poem seems to have not changed at all in the cited poems of the 90s.

The quality and scope of the demands from a poet have further narrowed from the days of Nemichandra Jain. The poems by Gyanendra Pati collected in *Gangatat*. (On the banks of the Ganges) illustrate this. It is mostly on Banaras but the city is documented here by an anthropologist working for a colonial power, not by a poet. That the colonial power here is possibly a reformist model is immaterial, since the basic determinator of observation remains alien and prescriptive. There is a monotony about the input which seems to yield invariably the same output, and there is certainly no special reason why Banaras has figured in these poems as base. The colour of the people of India fades into a monochrome of well-known statistical accounts like poverty and the opposition to big planning etc. It is really strange that so much is being written on so little; equally well, so little is being written on so much.

Rajesh Joshi with his *Do Panktiyon Ke Beech* (Between two lines), is almost like a clone of Gyanendra Pati. He writes about Bhopal, a New Bhopal not very different from the Banaras of Gyanendra Pati. Indeed, as I have suggested above, there is very little variation today between poets since they all have the same success formula. Like another industry which firmly adheres to success formulae, the Bollywood industry, and like yet another industry which has loftier pretentions, the industry of revolutions, there is an occasional success but there are too many failures. Rajesh Joshi has some poems in the autobiographical mode, a mode most difficult to work in but which with a lack of sensitivity is in a position to increase quantitative output to any desired limit. The basic fragility of what can be called the Raghuvir Sahay style: select an object and approach it as an enemy in a verbal war whom you have to trash, seems to be the favourite

today. Both Gyanendra Pati and Rajesh Joshi try this without a sign of scepticism about what they are doing.

Indeed, lack of scepticism and wonder, the two ingredients poetry cannot do without, seems to me the major weakness of contemporary Hindi poetry. The weakness originates in the encounter with the British which accredited the British power to their cultural superiority symbolized in the 19th century chiefly by their formal education system. Adoption of this education system was the major concern of many reformists and nationalists. Coupled with this came many other things. Indian literature was found wanting in several respects, and lack of social concern was one chief shortcoming. This was easy to remedy and the glut of ethical sermons that were to be called literature seems to have never abated. The soft option for wannabe poets was exclusively promoted by the Progressive Movement of which *Tarasaptak* was an output though most of its poets later disowned the Revolution or were disowned by the Revolution in a superficial way in chronography. Since the entire movement in India was spurious, an act of conversion or apostasy did not make any serious difference to the core issue which was that of preferring mediocrity to quality. Since one of the premises was that the new norms of creativity were not subject to scrutiny because they were new, and the power equations were loaded in favour of the new, extra-literary criteria were increasingly to determine the merit.

Ashok Vajpeyi has been one of the exceptions to the rule. I have liked his poems and have recorded it publicly. He has been accused of sensuality and eroticity, at the very least of celebrating the Body; serious charges of bad behaviour in the Victorian normativity which dominates Indian creativity and grants a moral holiday only when an artist with the proper leftist credentials chooses to hurl an obscenity or two at the 'conservative' society. Thus, in this normativity the Body is an undesirable unless it is a political weapon; much in the same way that it is impolite to abuse anybody unless he be a repulsive object like a landowner or an industrialist or a priest, in which case it becomes a duty.

The collection of poems that is before me, namely *Samay Ke Paas Samay* (The time that Time has), tries to express some other concerns. There is a set of "autobiographical"poems, a mode which has not been successful in Hindi poetry since it is a difficult mode to work in. While in the case of Ashok Vajpeyi the output is still very different, the difference lies in the packing of real everyday details. A personal diary in the public domain may make good reading but somehow I do not have a taste for voyuristic reading and I am unable to rate them at the same level at which I place many other poems by him.

Of all the four books which I am talking about, I liked one long poem by Ashok Vajpeyi which comprises a section of his book under review. This is titled *Shatabdi Ke Kagar Par* (On the brink of the end of the century). Provoked by a simple, largely fictitious idea of a sense of an approaching end, genuineness is brought in by an application to various professions, starting from a pot to a potter, a blacksmith and so on. Here is a true 'declassing', because in the house of poetry, they are all equal and their articulations try to capture the sense of linear time in a nonlinear language, the language of poetry. This struggle of the medium and the message, in which the message is submerged into the medium but the process imposes an uneasy tension due to the straightening efforts of definitional curves, superposes two contradictories into a single state of inequilibrium. And what is the difference between receiving poetry and receiving bliss? It is precisely this inequilibrium which differentiates poetry from bliss.■

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A Celebration of the Poetic Imaginary

Rukmini Bhaya Nair

CHANDRABHAGA: A MAGAZINE OF INDIAN WRITING, NEW SERIES
Edited by Jayanta Mahapatra
Cuttack, Orissa, Vols. I, II, (2000), Vol. III (2001), Single Copy Rs. 100.00 each

Within a week of the first two volumes of *Chandrabhaga* coming to me for review, my son is rushed to hospital for an emergency appendicitis operation. I push aside the poetry. By the time my son has recovered, the third volume arrives. Coincidentally, this time it is my father who is in intensive care for an angioplasty procedure on his heart. Again, I abandon the poetry.

There is, after all, no contest. Immediate demands, the hazards of health and the myriad engagements in our everyday lives must always take precedence over an esoteric concern with words. Indeed, I find to my surprise that the editor of this fine journal, Jayanta Mahapatra, insists with deliberate irony on just such a disjunction between the pragmatic and poetic:

> Poetry doesn't help our world, nor does it extend it. It is catered to by grumpy individuals who spin their webs of feeling in dim, dreamy rooms. It is a fragile, private business...[but] if I believe that of all art forms, poetry could still stretch the non-existent membrane of the mind, should my actions be judged?...We would like to believe. In the ceremony of poetry.

Mahapatra's emphasis on the perverseness of his own beliefs in this brief credo is brilliant as strategy because it boldly proclaims for poetry a pre-eminent place in the territory of thought. Poetry is of no practical consequence whatsoever, yet it succeeds in the most difficult task of all—it 'stretches the mind'. It is the preserve of a 'grumpy' individuality, of a whimsical commitment to free will despite the fact that the world stays indifferent:

> Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and [now] Jhumpa Lahiri keep winning prizes, but for fiction. Apparently, poetry doesn't count. I am not complaining. Most magazines get on well without printing poetry. Would this be because poetry doesn't give us any information in an age of information technology?

An alert reader will guess that the real argument here is not in the least about whether a novel contains more 'information' than a poem. Fiction is, by definition, a form of falsehood. Ergo, *prima facie*, it has no more claim to presenting 'the facts' than poetry. If poetry truly 'doesn't count', the reasons go deeper. As I see it, Mahapatra invokes a much older cross-cultural schism in his perspective—exemplified in the metaphor of 'soul-versus-body'.

Other 'art-forms' including fiction, permit a practitioner to be a *bhogi*, to blithely garner prizes and praise. Poetry, however, with its exclusive concentration on feeling and the representation of mental spaces, requires a writer to be a *yogi*, to eschew worldliness itself. That is why it is often considered a form of prayer, of *tapas*—no matter how sensual its themes or how provocative its language. Traditions such as that Bhakti poetry illustrate precisely such an understanding of the essence of poetry.

In terms of a 'western' model, it might be said that Mahapatra's doctrine refurbishes the 'Platonic' portrait of the poet as an introvert, unsociable being—an outcast from the ideal republic in which the rest of the contented citizenry go about their legitimate business. His statement expresses, for example, sentiments similar to Auden's great *Elegy on the Death of William Butler Yeats*—"poetry makes nothing happen; it survives". It also echoes Yeat's own lament in *The Second Coming* about a disastrous era for poetry in which "the ceremony of innocence is drowned".

So, what does Mahapatra hope to accomplish by trying to revitalize such age-old 'belief' in "the ceremony of poetry"? Well, one way to frame this question is to visualize Mahapatra as a contemporary Don Quixote charging at the

gigantic windmills of an info-tech universe in defense of his beloved ideal.

Like Yeats, like Cervantes, Mahapatra is a romantic conservative. He wants to bring innocence and ritual magnificence back into a world where savvy commercialism is the order of the day. His is a celebration of the poetic imaginary—a desire to bring the village to the metropolis, the sound of the *bhashas* to the cadences of English, and vice-versa. Now, these are no mean ambitions: they exemplify a linguistic yearning with which millions of sub-continental readers and writers will identify. Hence, my humble endeavour in this essay will be to play Sancho Panza to Sri Mahapatra of Tinkonia Bagh, Cuttack as he traces his poetic quest through the pages of the recently resuscitated *Chandrabhaga*.

> Our new readers may not be aware that *Chandrabhaga* enjoyed an uninterrupted run between the years 1979-1985...However, the magazine ceased publication in 1986. Now, after 15 years, we hope to publish the best writing available to us, and to showcase the emerging and the established, *especially in the realm of poetry* [my italics].

It is the last phrase in the paragraph above that seems to me of crucial import. This is so because, over the same 15 years that *Chandrabhaga* remained unpublished, we have witnessed a huge growth in fiction-writing in English. The spectacular success of *Midnight's Children* has led to an almost total international focus on the Indian English novel—to the exclusion of poetry, translation and major publications in the *bhashas*.

Indian Writing in English (IWE) has come to be equated with Indian Fiction in English (IFE). That is why it is so refreshing when *Chandrabhaga* calls itself 'a magazine of Indian Writing' but unabashedly devotes itself to poetry, translation and full-scale critical essays on modern Indian poetics. Thus far, confronted with the claim that Indian poetry in English (IPE) has in fact produced major voices during the last two decades, most critics, docilely following international trends and Rushdie's pronouncements, are dismissive. Or, at best they adopt 'safe-mode' tactics—maybe there are some gifted poets but we'll tell you about them in twenty years when no critical risks are involved! Likewise, translations of major *bhasha* writers into English are routinely characterized as 'lacking in quality'.

The truth, however, is that we have been guilty of critical sloth, and we have lacked both courage and enthusiasm. We have *simply not looked* in the direction of poetry for a long time. *Chandrabhaga*'s great merit is that it now provides a space where the literary gaze may be re-focussed on the nodal intersection of poetry and translation. In practical terms, this means that we get a chance to sample the writings of poets from Orissa—Basudev Sunani, Rajendra Kishore Panda, Arupnanda Panigrahi, Manoranjan Satpathy—whose talent cannot be gainsaid.

What these moving translations demonstrate is the emancipatory power of regionalism. Because they are right there where the action is, Mahapatra and his colleagues have been able to locate writers of wit, sophistication and feeling whose works travel across linguistic boundaries without the fuss we usually associate with expatriate diasporic writers agonizing over their 'identity'. 'Sadananda's Sighting of the Sea' by Sunani (trans. Rabindra K. Swain), for example, achieves the oblique—and bleak—self-referencing characteristic of true poetry minus the necessary concessions to the discourse of victimhood made by the more trendy, politically correct postcolonial writer in English.

> You used to say
> I thought I understood
> But I misunderstood.
>
> The wave
> hungry wings of a stork
> flying over my field.
>
> The seashore
> my sandy yard
> keeping a record
> of the vanishing footprints...
> You know,
> my name is Sadananda
> I live in Nagaon
> I came here to Bhubaneshwar
> to participate in the Farmers' Fair
> and to receive the Governor's Award
> for the best production of brinjals.
>
> The world began with the sea
> the sea is everything
> everything is in the sea.
>
> I hadn't got you right.
> How can we not have drought
> when all the water
> is mortgaged here to the sea?
> The sea is very selfish.

If the modern nation-state doling out 'awards' is an understated presence against the pitiless backdrop of a primal sea in Sunani, lightweight academic enterprise is contrasted with the deep peace of nature in Desmond Kharmawphlang's *On Shamla Hills* (addressed to J. Swaminathan, friend and teacher)

> One by one, the ducks take off
> having written stories on the
> great scroll of water. The lake
> breathes easily, rustling leaves
> and dry grass.
>
> You said you grow weary of
> speakers who cross continents
> penetrate jungles, dissect tribes
> and pluck philosophy from unnamed
> wild songs, and all this
> in the name of scholarship.
>
> So under the shade of the plaintain
> we sit and talk about the simple
> lessons of truth. Then we smoke
> silently.

As I type up these poems, I notice that my automatic on-screen spell-check underlines in red the words 'brinjal' in Sunani's verse and 'plaintain' in Kharmawphlang's. Obviously, they do not yet make the grade into internet English —"and all this in the name of scholarship"!

Despite the disapproval of my 'international' computer, however, a heartening self-confidence of voice and vocabulary is evident throughout the pages of *Chandrabhaga*. There is, in particular, a strong contingent of poets speaking out of the north-east—Kynpham Singh Nongkinrih writing in Khasi, Tangjam Ibopishak in Manipuri, Prem Narayan Nath in Assamese and Robin S. Nagangom in English.

Exciting women writers whom I had not previously read include Vinodini (Telegu) and Debarati Mitra (Bangla). In addition, Arun Kamal (Hindi), Chandrashekhar Kambar (Kannada) and K. Satchidanandan (Malayalam) produce fine contemporary verse from different zones of the country, while Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre, Bibhu Padhi and Ranjit Hoskote are responsible for some extremely accomplished writing in English.

One minor oddity, though. In curious contrast to the vitality of the offerings within, the 'Contents' page of this journal is perhaps the most austere that I have seen in recent times. It just mentions, dead-pan, the *number* of poems each writer has contributed, for example

Mamang Das	Two Poems
Nilmani Phookan	Four Poems
Kunhunni	Ten Poems

I'm impressed. You have to be a real aficionado to pursue your poetic quarry beyond so uncompromising a barrier. Mahapatra is just as stern with himself—his own work conspicuous by its absence in the journal. Again, an admirable ethical position. Luckily though, he is kinder to his essayists. They get to have full-dress rehearsals of their titles in the Contents, for example,

Makarand Paranjape	The State of Poetry: Reflections on the Changing Identity of Indian English Verse
John Oliver	Perry On Seeking an Appropriately Multicultural Criticism for India's Literatures.

Indeed, a major intellectual advantage of this journal seems to be its critical outreach. Issues of translation, regionalism, nationalism, pluralism and identity; surveys of current poetry (Pramod K. Nayar), special essays on themes such as 'Indian poetry and the gods' (Krishna Rayan), all seem to find a place here. One can visualize later issues carrying letters

and interviews. Of course, as always, there is a huge variation in quality. Some contributions such as Paranjape's, Perry's and Rayan's impress, others are plodding, but overall the criticism in *Chandrabhaga* manages to convince readers that an integral connection exists between the critical and the creative.

Mahapatra may quixotically have contended that 'poetry does not extend our world' but, fortunately, this doesn't appear to be what either he or his contributors believe. On the contrary, the pragmatic is *never* disconnected from the poetic. When, for instance I, Sancho Panza, finally get back from my hospital duties, it is with trepidation that I flick open an issue of Don Mahapatra's magazine. The randomness of my act is a measure of my desperation. I'm thinking: 'how on earth am I going read through all of this and say anything remotely sensible?' And it is right then that the following lines confront me:

Bliss
On the banks of Chandrabhaga
He stands
Perfect, decorated, balanced
On the brick
Waiting for his devotee.

How odd! Who would have expected that Chokhamela, fourteenth century Varkari poet of Maharashtra, contributor of the final poem in the third volume of *Chandrabhaga*, would so pointedly refer to the very journal I have long neglected to review? Yet, as far as I am concerned, he has done exactly that with startling, unbeatable, anachronistic directness—and I am left with no option but to obey my *karma*. Like it or not, I have to journey to the 'banks of the Chandrabhaga' for I have, in effect, been commanded to finish my review. The poetry will not be pushed aside anymore.

Sure, if one were literal-minded one would see only the reference to a sacred river and a poised god in this old-fashioned verse (ably translated by Rohini Mokashi Punekar); but that is not how poetry works. There's a message here all right: subliminal, sublime. This journal awaits the 'devotees' it so richly deserves.■

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Function as God's Word

Prema Nandakumar

KARUKKU
By Bama. Translated from the Tamil original by Lakshmi Holmstrom
Macmillan Dalit Writing in Translation, Macmillan, Chennai, 2000, pp. 108, Rs. 90.00

One may change one's class, religion, even gender. But one cannot change one's caste! Such is the ferocious truth that reigns in India. Bama is a Roman Catholic who finds that Christianity has also failed the dalit population in Indian society:

"Although the author of The Epistle to the Hebrews (New Testament) described the Word of God as a two-edged sword, it no longer stirs the hardened hearts of the many who have sought their happiness by enslaving and disempowering others.

In order to change this state of affairs, all dalits who have been deprived of their basic rights must function as God's word, piercing to the very heart. Instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights, and battle for them."

Be like the saw-edged palmyra leaf, *karukku*, when facing opposition. Also, be an aspirant like the embryo, *karu*! Such is the message emblematized by the symbol that forms the title of this striking autobiography which is as powerfully evocative as *Upara* (1980), the celebrated autobiography of Laxman Mane in Marathi. Lakshmi Holmstrom's translation efficiently invokes the presence of the cancer of untouchability in our national fabric. When she writes that the book is concerned "with the single issue of caste oppression within the Catholic Church and its institutions and presents Bama's life as a process of self-discovery", all is said at once.

The homegrown genre of Catholic dalit experience in Tamil Nadu has its own diction which cannot be conveyed across in an English translation. Hence, there is an unavoidable loss of striking power but the soul element comes through. "Our village is very beautiful", begins Bama. Nature has been generous but it is man who has grown expert in touch-me-notism. The Naicker will not touch a Paraya, and even the former's vessel should not come in contact with the latter's, though the Paraya must needs do all the filthy chores in the Naicker household. Bama, inspired by her elder brother, concentrates on her studies. Inspite of all the indignities she was subjected to, Bama was lucky. An armyman's daughter, she could get good education and a teaching job. However, she did not like the way the nuns in the school oppressed dalit children. To become an efficient instrument for getting out of the shell of casteist separativity, Bama entered a religious order.

Now is revealed the steady downward circles of Malbowges in the Christian Church. In this particular order Tamils are seen as a lower caste (!) and among the Tamils, Parayar formed a still lower category. What else can you expect in a society which sets apart even cemeteries in terms of caste difference? Poverty, high-handedness, police excesses, villages emptied of their menfolk who run away to the woods. It is a recurring tragedy where even a ripe banana can cause a murderous clash between Pallar and Parayar. Not surprisingly the story of Nallathangal marks the tragic ambience of life in these parts. Dalit awareness, however, is neither for Nallathangal nor Jesus Christ during any festival. These people prefer to see a picture starring Jayalalitha and MGR, drink toddy or arrack and round up the festivities with fisticuffs and fights.

Escaping this life was not too difficult for Bama who had gained collegiate education. But she does not feel at home in the nun's habit. Though there is good food, a comfortable room and an enviable status as a teacher, Bama's heart is on fire. The way the convent school treats the poor but pampers children from wealthy families scorches her soul. The unfairness of it all! So she leaves the convent and returns to the uncertainties of a dalit existence in the outside world.

Bama's account of her Christian experience is almost plaintive. The Devil is a ubiquitous presence, one must needs acknowledge being a sinner at the confessional according to a set ritual, and receive unjust punishments without a mew of complaint. A child's faith that is so crystalline, a young girl's faith that has a romantic tinge: and then, it is all gone in the glare of dalit experience. Is there a wealthy Jesus, an upper-caste Christ?

"With such an ecstasy of devotion they claim in church that God was born into a poor family, lived among the poor, and died poor. But if by accident a poor and lowly person appears within the precincts of the convent or the school, they'll fall upon that person, like rabid dogs."

It all sounds harsh, but who can blame Bama? Though the Christian people as a whole are mostly dalits and lowly people, commanding authority is with the Christians belonging to the upper-castes who "control the dispossessed and the poor by thrusting a blind belief and devotion upon them and by turning them into slaves in the name of God, while they themselves live in comfort." They feel that helping a dalit is equivalent to helping a cobra! Bama has seen, suffered and has been tugged by

a certain hopelessness. A Nadar or a Naicker will not help a dalit and where can the dalit go? Can we not change the existing order?

The 'Afterword' written seven years after publishing the Tamil original finds Bama a sadder woman but also a stronger person full of constructive anger. It is no easy task for a woman to live alone with no family in today's world but Bama knows that an aimless life is going to be a miserable existence. The first sentence, "our village is very beautiful" gets purposively docketed with the concluding message of Bama:

"Each day brings new wounds, but also new understanding, new lessons that experience teaches, sufficient mental strength to rise up even from the edge of defeat. I have seen the brutal, frenzied and ugly face of society and been enraged by it. But at the same time, I have danced with joy because of the sweetness and simplicity of a life that is in touch with nature. Even though I have walked hand in hand with anxieties, I have also recognised a strength and zest within myself, flowing like a forest stream, and this has refreshed me."

This is indeed a spiritual state of being where the rose and the fire have grown into one. The rose of faith has not been scorched by the blazing fire of anger within Bama. God may have deserted the church and the convent but not her mortal breast as she tramples through man's hate and human spite in search of a new dawn. And that is what gives Bama the strength to fight for dalit liberation. May her tribe increase!■

Prema Nandakumar is a critic.

Communication

I read the review of the book *Walking from the Gallows* by Krishna Datta. I have also read the book and find the topic a very interesting one, as the reviewer notes. Apart from the irritants of bad editing and narrative technique, the book is enjoyable.

However one question nags me (in fact at every page and at every repetition of episodes) which neither the publisher's blurb nor the author nor the reviewer has answered: Just who is Krishna Datta and who are the Datta clan?

Dr. P.K. Ananthanarayanan
Faridabad

Intimations of an Epic Mind

A.J.Thomas

VYASA AND VIGHNESWARA
By Anand. Translated from the Malayalam by Saji Mathew
Katha, 2000, New Delhi, pp 166, Rs.200.00

These are times when "international" anthologists ride roughshod over celebrated fiction writers in the "vernacular" languages in preference to Indian English writers. Beginning with Salman Rushdie's *Vintage Book* and his article, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You," in *The New Yorker* (June 23 & 30, 1997)an argument has set in, playing down the strength of the modern classics in the national languages of India and glorifying Indian English writing as "the most adventurous" fiction today. Small wonder then that Tarasankar Banerjee and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai do not figure in a recent anthology of Indian literature edited by one of the leading lights of Indian English fiction.

Anand (P. Sachidanandan), the stalwart Malayalam fiction writer noted for the quiet strength of his works, could be the perfect answer to those who doubt the existence of any significant fiction in the Indian languages. His *Vyasa and Vighneswara*, translated into English by Saji Mathew and published by Katha, New Delhi,(pranaams to Katha; they make it possible for Indian literatures to have at least some visibility nowadays, through their translation projects) is a novel in two parts—'Kriti' and 'Kaalam'—followed by a brilliant essay by Udaya Kumar titled 'Anand and the Poetics of Incompleteness.' Appended at the end are excerpts from a few reviews the Malayalam original had received.

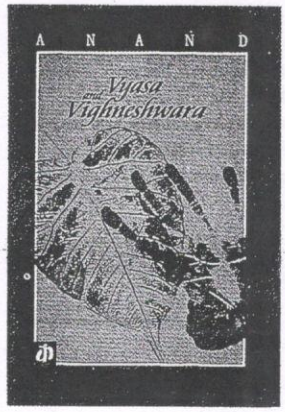
Anand is a writer's writer. His major preoccupations—history, philosophy, politics, and the sense of the tragic inherent in the human predicament—and meditations on them, serve as grist to the mill of other literary artists. His first novel *Alkkoottam (*The Crowd) published in 1970, set in Bombay, was a welcome departure from the mainstream romantic-realist novels of his elder contemporaries. *Marubhoomikal Undakunnathu* (*Desert Shadows*,Penguin India) and *Govardhante Yatrakal* (Travels of Govardhan) which followed, established Anand as a philosopher-novelist. *Vyasa and Vighneswara* also presents before the reader discussions that externalize the author's meditations which the reader soon realizes as his own. The structure of the novel reminds one of electrodes between which sparks fly. Vyasa engaged in his Kriti, of whom, Vigneswara, his stenographer, demands uninterrupted Kaalam in the form of dictation and the sage demanding total and instantaneous comprehension of the Kriti by the scribe! Look at what the author has to say:

> " Once the universe he(Brahma) created entered into the realm of time, he only has this to say to it—know yourself, know more"(p. 57).

Look, again, the way he defines his own work, within the text itself:

> "In a sense this novel can claim to be the story of two books—one, a purana available only in parts, and the second, half-written play. Or, if I could describe it another way, I would call it a story of two extraordinary characters who I happened to meet between the 60s and the 90s—within three decades. My critics, who continue to argue whether a literary work ought to be developed through plots and characters or through ideas, have spent plenty of ink writing about this. Here I am throwing yet another problem for them to crack—how about developing it through someone else's texts"(pp. 58-59).

In 'Kriti' the action takes off with the narrator Ananda making a connection between the silk weavers of Bengal in the 18th Century chopping off their thumbs as a means of refusing to do bonded labour for the corrupt British East India Company officials and Ekalavya, the Nishada prince in the *Mahabharata*, chopping off his thumb to be given as gurudakshina to his guru, Dronacharya. Soon,Major Dharmadhikari reveals to Ananda the existence of an unknown purana besides the known eighteen puranas and upa-purananas—*The Nishada Purana.* This purana contains discussions between Abhimanyu trapped in the Chakravyuha and Ekalavya, whom Krishna had already killed off. These discussions are about the ramifications of vidya, freedom and fate in different contexts in the *Mahabharata* story. Then outside the main arguments are Ananda's various adventures in search of the full text(as the one he encounters in a library is a fragment), the seemingly contradictory information the dying Dharmadhikari leaves for him(Dharmadhikari



confesses that he had simply made up the figure of Sadashiv Joshi who supposedly spoke about the existence of *Nishada Purana* and the purana itself, from his own imagination). The reader is left with a sense of mystery, but the resolution of it comes through, though:

> "The conflict between vidya, art and knowledge on the one side, and power, selfishness and greed on the other has not been exhaustively written about even after two or five thousand years since its assumed beginning"(p. 53).

'Kalam,' is the story of another imagined text, an incomplete play, *Nagaravadhu*. During a train journey from Bengal to Delhi, Ananda meets Vardhamana, a political activist-playwright. They get into a deep discussion about the state of affairs in the country in the spring of 1966, and begin to examine the concept of democracy. Vardhamana at this point takes out his incomplete play and reads it out to Ananda.The story of Vajji or Vaishali, which enjoyed democracy like a Greek city state during the Buddha's time and the fate of Ambapali whom the chief citizens turned into the city's prostitute(Nagaravadhu—bride of the city) through a resolution of the governing council are examined in detail in the play. During the night, Vardhamana escapes from the train, unbeknown to Ananda, from the pursuing police. Ananda runs into Vardhamana nine years later, during another train journey. Vardhamana now is a clairvoyant, who had been mistaken for a madman and put in an asylum, and is on his return journey after being released. He relates to Ananda his experiences with the state's officials on the one hand and his comrades, the activists, on the other—that neither of them could understand him. That dreams were beyond the realm of both. Ambapalli's tragedy was that she could see far ahead of her times, and feel that their political system was rotting inwardly. But the agents of that rot, the ruling oligarchy, the Lichchavis, were uncomfortable with the clarity of her dreams. They wanted only the conveniences of the present to continue, breeding ad-hocism, and were ultimately driven to measures like their handling of Ambapalli, like Indira Gandhi's handling of democracy leading to the Emergency. However, the sense of mystery in 'Kaalam' gives way to a parable-like simplicity in a surrealistic setting —Vardhamana who got down from the express train at midnight either in Igatpuri or Nashik, is found knocked to death by the same express train several hours later near Kalyan, close to Bombay, after running all night! How? Because, .. "Somehow he always managed to walk ahead of time....He ran faster than the train and thus reached the field of black soil...but there, he fell"(pp.133-134).

Anand has a very wry comment about readers who are after a literature of convenience, and possibly writers and publishers looking for marketability and assured success....

> "Why is it that readers are not particularly fond of literary works which touch upon aspects of time, bear the weight of history and carry the turbulence of dreams?"(p.117)

See how he looks at true literature:

> "Yes, literature alone flows unmitigated, connecting everything through time. That is why literary creations are called kritis, works. When smriti, what is remembered, and shruti, what is heard, get subsumed by vismriti, amnesia, and further by mriti, death, kriti alone remains...."

Here he falls back on the Vyasa and Vigneshwara episode quoted above and pronounces the final verdict:

> "Vigneswara, the scribe, who was summoned to write(down) the epic, demanded that there be no hindrances on the part of the author while dictating. The author, on the other hand, demanded that the scribe should understand every word in the telling. Because a meaningless telling is like journeying through kaalam without the experience of kriya"(p.126).

I like to end this review quoting Vardhamana:

> "....Literature has no end , Ananda. Because it is imagination, and imagination is the future. Without the future, without dreams, we too are not. Literature will continue to save our dreams from the angry fires of the present" (p.129).

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Malayali Exotica

Rangamani Parthasarathy

THE RIVER HAS NO CAMERA
By Anjali Chandran
Srishti Publishers, 2001, pp. 293, Rs 195.00

Blame it on Arundhati Roy. Her evocative tale of the skeletons in a family cupboard set in the lush beauty of Kerala has obviously spawned a number of me-too writers wanting to cash in on Malayali exotica. Anjali Chandran seems to be one of those.

Unfortunately, her first novel, *The River Has No Camera*, just doesn't have what it takes. The plot has potential. Fed up with her life in Bombay, the protagonist-narrator (we're never told her name) goes to the family home at Alanghat. She is running away from a strained relationship with her mother, a failed relationship with a married man during the course of which she had four abortions and her on-the-rebound depraved lifestyle complete with booze, drugs and sex with strangers. She is supposed to renovate Alanghat to make it attractive for buyers. There she stumbles upon a dark family secret. In the end, of course, she renovates her own life as well, makes new friends, sets up an NGO, and finds a lost uncle. All's well that ends well.

This could have been the stuff of a novel full of mystery, suspense and drama. Unfortunately, pedestrian writing lets it down. Chandran simply lacks a sense of narrative.

The family history, culminating in a couple of murders, is a straight, dull account, lacking in any tension or suspense. The readers are told various things. That the mother and daughter have an uneasy, hostile relationship, with frequent and bitter fights. But there's not one lacerating verbal exchange that the readers are witness to. Antagonistic mother-daughter relationships have tremendous scope for searing drama. Alas, Chandran reduces it to a few dispassionate sentences scattered here and there. Sample this: "I could sense that my mother was relieved and that made me angrier." Or this: "My mother and I quarreled all the time."

We are told that the protagonist indulges in multi-partner sex during the debauched phase of her life because her married lover of many years had claimed that each of the babies she had aborted was not his. We are told that memories from that phase of her life keep tormenting her. These are not things that the reader senses while reading the book. It almost seems as if Chandran is scared the readers may miss all this if it is not spelt out in black and white.

Dull descriptions of Kerala's social structure —the matrilineal system, the rigid caste

structure which specified the distance that various lower castes had to keep from the Brahmins and how parayas (pariahs) had to behave—read like extracts from a sociology text book. They're not even integrated seamlessly with the narrative and so tend to stick out like so many sore thumbs. It's the same with her account of her NGO work in Alanghat. It's a colourless report, and has no place in a novel.

Chandran tries hard to pep things up, with liberal sprinkling of Malayali words, some of which are translated there and then while others are left unexplained. Often the author tries to slip into the casual, conversational mode, with sentences like "you'll have to forgive me for digressing like this. But you'll have to put up with this." But since there's no consistency in style, it only tends to irritate.

There are typos in the first page of the first chapter and on the first page of the last chapter. There are repetitions. On two occasions the protagonist talks about her own music sounding like a Maruti in reverse gear. And there's an incomplete sentence on page 60: "It just wasn't me. I was too." You are too casual, Ms Chandran.■

Rangamani Parthasarathy is a freelance critic.

Haunting Vignettes

Subarno Chatterji

NO BLACK NO WHITE
By Nisha da Cunha
HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 135, Rs. 195.00

There is an overarching melancholy that dominates this collection. Indeed happiness or the possibility thereof, is always dashed by human frailty, folly, or circumstance.

To write that Nisha da Cunha's short stories are well written and finely crafted would be to state the obvious. The thirteen stories in *No Black, No White* (a trite title incongruous with the rest of the book) are almost without exception haunting vignettes of human sorrow and loss. There is an overarching melancholy that dominates this collection. Indeed happiness or the possibility thereof, is always dashed by human frailty, folly, or circumstance. The pall that hangs over these stories is occasionally lightened but in the main humanity (and women in particular since all the stories are dominated by women) is plagued by loneliness, unfulfilled love, and hopelessness. It is a vision superbly portrayed but a trifle repetitive and perhaps overly deterministic.

'Ember Days' is a fine rendition of loneliness within a particularly Anglo-Indian milieu. The main character Connie Tims aptly sums up identity and its concomitant confusions: 'It's a ridiculous name. It's a nowhere name. But then we are an in-between or nowhere people' (p. 5) This indeterminacy is reflected in the relationship Connie shares with Prescott who loves her and teaches her the piano as an expression of that unfulfilled and unexpressed love. This is the only story where da Cunha attempts an extended self-reflexivity in her writing three different 'beginnings' and three 'endings', 'The end (Connie's truth)', 'End II (Prescott's truth)', 'End III (The neutral truth)'. As a student and teacher of English Literature da Cunha would doubtless be aware of the problems inherent in the last ending, or is she merely parodying the banal self-reflexivity of some other Indo-Anglian writers? As parody it works, as serious writing it is trite. Her writing is at its best in sentences such as 'A trail of snail slime's shining path' (p. 7) rather than in deliberate literariness.

'Letting it Go' is perhaps the only exception to the gloom that dominates this collection. Em growing old and her love of the mountains and of life are a brilliant combination of wisdom, hope, and memory. Em's monologue encapsulates the paradox of growing old: 'It's odd, my own thoughts are young and full of anger and loves and longing but when somebody speaks to me I sound so different, with the dry abrupt clarity of an old woman' (p. 38). Em's is a life lived to the full, without illusions and self-pity. It is a rare vision in this collection.

'The Dearly Beloved, Kept Woman' is another tale of loneliness, love, longing, and waiting. The 'kept woman' loses her lover and contemplates a lifetime without him. Her consolation is that she had twenty years of his love. Her trauma is the void left by his death.

'Salad Days' changes locale in that the protagonist goes to Israel to meet her friend and lover, Abel. The intimacy of lost opportunities and love is at the heart of the story and although it offers closure there is no happiness. As the narrator says, 'This was not a film' and that seems to imply that unhappy lives must continue. Perhaps in that ability to carry on despite grief, loss, and longing lies a deep strength and integrity which is a common quality shared by all the women in these stories. There is a politics of empowerment underlying these seemingly 'hopeless' stories, but that politics is somewhat overdetermined. 'Salad Days' is politically an exception in that Abel also provides commentary on the harshness of Israel: 'When I was young Israel was young. Now I am almost old and my country is old with war and bloodshed and fear around them and it has made them fierce and full of pride' (p. 59).

'Pebbles in a Stream' delineates a mother's mourning for her son killed on a trek. 'A Woman of my Age' returns to the theme of unfulfilled love, the inability to seize the day, and the relentless passage of time. 'The Ballad of the Good Priest' offers a delicate insight into the pain of exile, the finality of cremation, and the beauty of graves as memorials. 'Like Heaven' is a touristy tale of two northern English women holidaying in Goa and one falling in love with a local who dies. Cross-cultural boundaries are transgressed for a while but it is a temporary phase. The story fails to move beyond the banal in its presentation of stereotypes. 'That Time of Year' delineates the temporary happiness of a plain Jane who marries the handsome Tony. Of course Tony dies in an accident and mother and daughter are left alone. This theme is repeated in 'Through a glass, darkly' where Mukta and Zara spend a life trapped by Zara's silence after an accident where her father and brother were killed.

Such bald summaries of the stories (and I have omitted some altogether) are perhaps unfair to the nuances embedded therein. That da Cunha writes well is beyond question. The summaries, however, serve to highlight my sense of predictability in the collection. Predictability is perhaps a kind of signature, of authorial presence (I will know a da Cunha story when I read one), and continuity. At the end I am left with a sense of inadequacy, of one story told in twelve different ways, of fine writing offering some fine insights coupled with many commonplaces, of a type of readerly lack of fulfilment.■

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CULTURAL STUDIES

Secularism, Islam and Modernity : Selected Essays of Alam Khundmiri edited with an introduction by M.T. Ansari, encapsulates Khundmiri's dual project of situating Islam in the modern context and scrutinizing the modern in the light of Islam.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 308, Rs. 250.00

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES/ECONOMICS

India's Development Experience : Selected Writings of S. Guhan edited by S. Subramanian is a posthumous selection of the wide-ranging work of a committed civil servant turned academic.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 368, Rs. 625.00

Implications of WTO Agreements for Indian Agriculture, coordinated by Samar K. Datta and Satish Y. Deodhar, is a collection of 25 papers put together to clear the confused thinking prevailing on the subject.
Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, pp. 756, Rs. 1475.00

Criteria and Indicators of Sustainability in Rural Development : A Natural Resource Perspective edited by Anil K. Gupta seeks to provide criteria and indicators to give coherence to the concept of sustainability.
Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, pp. 424, Rs. 900.00

Working Children's Report India—1998 facilitated and compiled by The Concerned For Working Children is the first report of its kind submitted by Indian children themselves and is a testament to their generosity.
Books for Change, Bangalore, 2000, pp. 78, Rs. 100.00

Towards Securer Lives : SEWA's Social Security Programme compiled and edited by Mala Dayal details the schemes for child care, health, nutrition, housing and insurance and brings alive how word and social security are intrinsically linked in the lives of women in the informal sector.
Ravi Dayal Publisher, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 160, Rs. 175.00

FICTION

Mosaic: New Writings from Award-winning British and Indian Writers edited by Monisha Mukundan explores new voices in the two countries and includes science fiction to poetry and from fantasy to realism.
Penguin, 1998, pp. 210, Rs. 200.00

Shock Therapy by Subodh Ghose, a collection of short stories translated from the Bengali, displays a strong narrative style.
Orient Longman, 2001, pp. 220, Rs. 200.00

HISTORICAL STUDIES

Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra by Cynthia Talbot offers a significant alternative to the earlier depictions of the history and society of 'traditional' India by presenting this period as one of dynamic change, characterized by extensive social and physical mobility and a militaristic ethos.
Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 305, Rs. 595.00

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Pakistan: Founders' Aspirations and Today's Realities edited by Hafeez Malik is the outcome of an international seminar held at Villanova University, Pennsylvania and analyses political, economic and military developments since the creation of Pakistan.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2001, pp. 469, price not stated.

South Asia at Gunpoint : Small Arms Light Weapons Proliferation edited by Dipankar Banerjee is based on the proceedings of a workshop organized by the RCSS in 2000 in collaboration with leading think tanks in South Asia.
RCSS, Colombo, 2001, pp. 319, price not stated.

Peace Process in Sri Lanka by Shahid Faiz and Ranabir Samaddar is a monograph which seeks to give an audit report of peace.
South Asia Forum for Human Rights, SAFHR Paper Series 8, April 2001, pp. 78, Rs. 70.00 (Nepali).

50 Years of India China : Crossing A Bridge of Dreams edited by G.P. Deshpande and Alka Acharya, a collection of papers presented at a national seminar held in New Delhi to celebrate fifty years of independent India and the PRC, seeks to make a qualitative leap in the vital area of India-China comparative studies in the contemporary context.
Tulika, 2001, pp. 538, Rs. 750.00

China's Century : The Awakening of the Next Economic Powerhouse by Laurence J. Brahm, with a foreword by China's Premier Zhu Rongji, brings together a distinguished group of industry experts from China and India to analyse the key issues affecting the future of China.
John Wiley & Sons (Asia), Singapore, 2001, pp. 421, price not stated.

Agricultural Planning and Achievement in Bangladesh by M.A. Sattar, a former director at the Bangladesh Water Development Board, analyses the successes and shortfalls in this important sector of the country's economy.
Oxford & IBH, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 158, Rs. 295.00

Media, Religion & Politics in Pakistan by Rai Shakil Akhtar takes a look at Pakistani culture and politics, and argues that an informal alliance between the civil bureaucracy, the landlord, ulema and the military has sought to keep the forces of change in check.
Oxford University Press, Karachi (Millennium Series), 2000, pp. 225, Rs. 495.00

LITERATURE

Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire : English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century by Suvir Kaul argues that the aggressive nationalism of James Thomson's ode "Rule, Britannia" (1740) is the condition to which much English poetry of the late 17th and 18th centuries aspires.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 337, Rs. 595.00

MANAGEMENT STUDIES

The Deep Blue Sea : Rethinking the Source of Leadership by Wilfred Drath takes a groundbreaking new look at twenty-first century leadership in the postindustrial information age.
JOSSEY-BASS (A Wiley Co.), San Francisco & Centre for Creative Leadership, 2001, pp. 185, price not stated.

POLITICAL STUDIES

India in the New Millennium by P.C. Alexander, a civil servant himself, looks at the challenges that India faces in the 21st century.
Somaiyya, Mumbai, 2001, pp. 288, Rs. 400.00

In Retrospect : Reflections on Select Issues in World Politics—1975-2000 by B. Vivekanandan scans the epoch-making developments in world politics over the last three decades of the 20th century and constitute the result of extensive research in many countries around the world.
Lancer's Books, 2001, pp. 446, Rs. 750.00

We carried a review of Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar in *The Book Review*, June 2001. In the 2nd para beginning "Zalzala begins..." after the sentence "In the introduction the editor..." the following sentence should appear: "A reading of the anthology shows that the poets including Sky Baba himself attack Muslim fundamentalism also". The omission is regretted.

from Oxford...

Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology
Collected Essays
Ebba Koch

Over the last twenty years, Ebba Koch has researched and analysed the transmission of artistic ideas over space and time and their significance. An internationally acknowledged expert on Mughal architecture, her effort has always been to use art history's own methods as a basis for her investigations. Her work is thus characterized by a thorough analysis of the form of the art work, which is then evaluated against information from written sources.

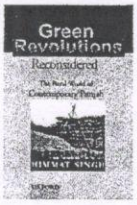
The eleven studies in this book offer a fresh and unique interpretation of Mughal art and architecture and its heterogeneous sources — Central Asian Timurid, Indian, Persian, and European — fused creatively to express an imperial ideology of universal aspirations.

The author shows that for Mughal patrons and artists the formal concern was not *l'art pour l'art* but the appeal to the senses conveyed an ambitious intellectual and political message. This is particularly true for the art and architecture created by Shah Jahan. The palaces and their decoration at Agra, Delhi, and Lahore, the imperial gardens, the urban designs, and the famous masterpieces of the emperor's patronage, the Taj Mahal, and the Windsor Castle *Padshahnama* all emerge from the discussion in a new light, as careful constructions of form and meaning.

The author's integrative approach draws attention to Mughal art as an historical source in its own right, offering unique insights into the cultural context in which it was created.

The volume, illustrated by 235 black and white illustrations, including newly measured drawings of Mughal buildings, will be an indispensable source for those interested in the Mughals. The book will interest not only scholars and students of art and architectural history but also students of general history, sociology, culture, literature, and religion.

0 19 564821 8 2001
280 x 220 mm 340 pp. Rs 1295



Green Revolutions Reconsidered
The Rural World of Contemporary Punjab
Himmat Singh

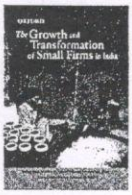
In recent decades the developing economies have generally experienced greater inequality and environmental damage, with population growth eating into productivity gains. This volume describes how post-green revolution Punjab constitutes the sole example where:

- rising population has not inundated the cities
- agricultural intensification has not degraded the environment
- increasing agricultural productivity has generated a real rise in agricultural incomes across the board
- a growing rural resource base has steadily upgraded the physical, social, and educational infrastructure in the countryside

The book demonstrates that the process of development in Punjab has resulted from long-term policy initiatives and programmes. Thus, instead of a mass movement into a haphazard urban informal sector located in city slums, there has been a movement of industry out of the cities. This has created an urban–rural continuum that combines the best of both worlds. Above all, it has also yielded a 'greening' of the environment, with increased reforestation and tree coverage.

The experience of Punjab indicates the possibility of 'leap frogging' intermediate stages of economic and social development to create what might potentially be called the developing world's first post-industrial rural society.

0 19 565189 8 2001
215 x 140 mm 316 pp. Rs 595



The Growth and Transformation of Small Firms in India
Sebastian Morris/Rakesh Basant/K. Ramachandran/ Abraham Koshy and *Keshab Das*

The volume assesses the performance of the small-scale sector in India, especially in response to the introduction of economic reforms. It evaluates the consistency and relevance of various policies in this context, including:

- reservations • excise duty concessions • infrastructural support and • credit availability.

The study finds that macroeconomic policy, especially with regard to trade and exchange rate and the functioning of credit markets, has severely discriminated against small firms. Bringing in a wide variety of evidence, including that from a large primary survey, the study recommends:

- more aggressive exchange rate policy • correction of the tariff inversion • incentivization of credit flows and • de-reservation.

This would make the sector the principal dynamic force in the economy. Small firms need to be freed rather than protected. The deep schism in the labour market makes small firms crucial to the transformation of the economy and to labour absorption.

The authors go beyond the current paradigm of 'protective' small industry policy and make recommendations both for the development of the sector, as well as for the growth and transformation of the economy. The characterization of the segments within the small-firms sector is new and innovative and leads to a new perspective of the economy and its structure.

0 19 565119 7 2001
215 x 140 mm 376 pp. Rs 595

Terror in the Mind of God
The Global Rise of Religious Violence
Mark Juergensmeyer

Beneath the histories of religious traditions—from biblical wars to crusading ventures and great acts of martyrdom—violence has lurked as a shadowy presence. Images of death have never been far from the heart of religion's power to stir the imagination. In this wide-ranging and erudite book, Mark Juergensmeyer asks one of the most important and perplexing questions of our age: why do religious people commit violent acts in the name of their god, taking the lives of innocent victims and terrorizing entire populations?

This first comparative study of religious terrorism explores recent incidents such as the World Trade Center explosion, Hamas suicide bombings, the Tokyo subway nerve gas attack, and the killing of abortion clinic doctors in the United States. Incorporating personal interviews with World Trade Center bomber Mahmud Abouhalima, Christian Right activist Mike Bray, Hamas leaders Sheik Yassin and Abdul Azis Rantisi, and Sikh political leader Simranjit Singh Mann, among others, Juergensmeyer takes us into the mind-set of those who perpetrate and support violent acts. In the process, he helps us understand why these acts are often associated with religious causes and why they occur with such frequency at this moment in history.

Terror in the Mind of God places these acts of violence in the context of global political and social changes, and sees them as attempts to empower the cultures of violence that support them. It analyzes the economic, ideological, and gender-related dimensions of cultures that embrace a central sacred concept—cosmic war—and that employ religion to demonize their enemies. Juergensmeyer's narrative is engaging, incisive, and sweeping in scope. He convincingly shows that while in many cases religion supplies the ideology, motivation, and organizational structure for the perpetrators of violent acts, it also carries the possibilities for peace.

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215 x 140 mm 348 pp. Rs 595

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