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VOLUME XXVII NUMBER 6 JUNE 2003



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0415314399

234 X 156 mm

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Subscription Rates 2003
Single Issue: Rs. 40.00
Annual Subscription (12 issues)
Individual: Rs. 400.00 / \$50.00 / £35.00
Institutional: Rs 500.00 / \$75.00 / £50.00
(Inclusive of bank charges and postage)
Life Donors: Rs 10,000.00 and above

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Footprints in the Sand: Wild Oats and Armchair Travels

Satyajit Rath

THE JOURNEY OF MAN: A GENETIC ODYSSEY
By Spencer Wells. Photographs by Mark Read
Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 224, Rs. 495.00

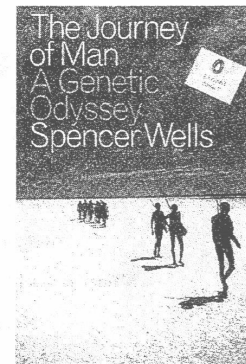
Spencer Wells is a molecular geneticist, and has spent much of his professional life in designing ways to track genetic variations that characterize the diversity of the genetic makeup of species. His enthusiasm has been given, perhaps as a result of working with two of the more interesting personalities in science interested in the issue, Richard Lewontin and Lucca Cavalli-Sforza, to tracking genetic similarities and differences between human groups separated by fair lengths of time, which is the core issue in this book. This kind of tracking provides an estimate of how long ago two groups became isolated from each other, and this of course is also an estimate of just how long ago the two groups were *not* isolated from each other. Effectively, all of this begins to impinge quite radically on the study of history. Immediately, 'national pride', 'race', and the rest of the entire gamut of us-versus-them bogeymen crawl clamorously out of the woodwork, cudgels, trishuls, what-have-you in hand.

It is strange, then, that evidence of poor editing and proofreading is more common than should be in so 'choice' a book, or do I have unrealistic expectations of Penguin? Confusingly, the order of the photograph captions at the end does not match that of the photographs themselves. Why can't the captions be given with the photographs in the first place, anyway? In fact, although Wells pays tribute to Mark Read for the photographs, I remain deeply puzzled about the point of the pictures. Wells says that the story as told by molecular genetics is not 'visually compelling', that the photographic portraits correct the imbalance, and that they reflect the way people actually live today. But his text never refers to them. And really, most of them are portraits, nice ones, but portraits, of people in 'remote' areas; so what can they do to add a visually compelling dimension to the story in the book, or even to show how people live (since most of them are close-up portraits)? Perhaps my bafflement is related to the handicap of not having seen the television serial on which the book is based. After all, I am also confused by the swings in the idiom that Wells uses—from complete (dare one say 'American' in these Big Brotherly days?) colloquialisms such as 'killer apps' ('apps', curiously, could be interpreted as

either 'appliances', which is what Wells means, or 'applications', which a software generation is more likely to do and which would put a totally different spin on the tale), via gung-ho travelogue airs of the Stanley-and-Livingstone kind—to professorial admonitions, giving the book a jerky feel. But perhaps these variations may fit well enough with changing locales and contexts in the original television serial form of the telling. I suppose in such a situation, saying that Darwin's important discoveries from the voyage of the *Beagle* included finding that the Tahitians were very attractive may sound just fine.

However, let me turn to the contents. First of all, to get the reviewer's prime function (well, one of them, anyway) out of the way; what is the book about? There has been a spate of investigations over recent years, that design and use better and better technologies, both for determining DNA sequences and for identifying variations between comparable sequences from different people fast and easily. What does that mean? DNA sequences, found in everybody's body cells, are a four-alphabet language, and offspring receive a copy of the parental sequence. However, every time copying is done, errors crop in at a certain rate. So a copy is not quite like the original, and each copy of the copy uniquely different from the original, and so on through the generations. If we look at a thousand copies, say, in the tenth generation, some errors will be found only uniquely in one copy, since they will have been generated during the last round of copying. There will be more extensive sharing of other errors, and the frequency of sharing will be related to how long back in the generations the error was introduced. The more extensive and reliable the sequences compared and error frequencies estimated, the more precise would be our guesses of the time course of human group movements. If the Jarawa in the Andamans share only a very few errors with Maithili Brahmins, they are likely to be related only far back in time. If they shared *no* errors at all, the odds would be good that they evolved completely independently. However, this of course is not true, that is where, properly, Wells begins.

In the face of much earlier argument a major achievement of molecular genetics



applied to human populations has been the fairly sound model of a single time-point evolution, over a hundred thousand years ago, of the human species, *Homo sapiens*, in Africa. Using recent data, Wells reinforces this model, and then provides a fast-paced tracking, an armchair travelogue, towards more recent times, by following the geographical distribution of shared variations in DNA sequences. From its African origin, the species spread first, some sixty thousand years ago, along the coast of the Arabian Sea, the Indian and the Pacific oceans as far as Australia. In a second movement fifty thousand-odd years back, West Asia was populated, followed by movements into Central Asia, and thence into Eastern Europe, China and South Asia. Native American (Amerindian) communities moved from North-Eastern Asia across the Bering bridge only about fifteen thousand years ago. We are one people and we come from Africa—no races, despite the centuries of pseudoscientific mumbo-jumbo to the contrary.

Wells goes to great pains to try to explain the biological theories and technologies that provide the information and its interpretations. For me, the attempt itself remains a major value of the book. The trouble is, while it all makes sense to me, I am not sure if that is simply because I am a biologist and should (!) know it anyway, or if it will in fact make sense to non-biologist readers as well. I have the uneasy feeling that, despite all the felicitous razzmatazz of Ock the Knife and the inheritance of bouillabaise recipes, many people will not really follow the biology and slide over it to the 'human interest' bits of the story. This would be a pity, both because the theory is truly beautiful, and because in the absence of comprehension, readers would be tempted to treat Wells as oracle, negating his careful efforts to talk about the limitations and uncertainties of the theories and the data. At the risk of being tedious, let me quote a recent description of a visit to an exhibition on Einstein at the

American Museum of Natural History by a (presumably) well-educated American columnist (Shari Caudron, in *The Hindu*, 20 April 2003): "Even though I listened to the curator's talk, and watched a film narrated by Alan Alda, and reviewed the 72-handwritten pages that make-up Einstein's theory of relativity, I couldn't grasp what his theories really meant. I started to get agitated and speed through the exhibit. Gravitational warps? The space-time continuum? Yeah, yeah, whatever. By the time I hit the gift shop at the end of the exhibit, I had a massive headache caused, no doubt, by an unprecedented cerebral failure. I sped past the wall of books on Einstein and picked up a souvenir-writing pen. Ahhhh. This was something I could understand. So simple. So elegant. I held it to my chest until my breath returned to normal." Poor Wells. Poor us.

In so globally depressed a state, I am reluctant to dwell at any length on the many interesting questions, even mysteries, that Wells either drops by the wayside or glosses over in his headlong dash. But a couple of issues need mention. The first one is, indeed, a leitmotif of the book, the identification of a *single* man, who probably lived about sixty thousand years ago, as our 'common' ancestor. In his enthusiasm for the notion, and it is a fascinating notion Wells does not quite make the point that this is a statistical notion (although he does pay lip service to it), and mostly reflects the limit of the analytical tools available, rather than being any definitive identification of an individual man. There is no certainty of a single ancestor here, but simply the probability that an extremely closely related and/or very small group of men in Africa, who had not yet achieved any major degree of DNA sequence diversity in those bits of the Y chromosome Wells and his colleagues have been studying, were the beginnings of today's human populations.

A second, related point Wells makes only cursorily is to do with the reliability of the assumption that the genetic variations being discussed arise at regular intervals and carry equal probabilities of being inherited and 'fixed' in populations. It is hard to be sure that the rate of genetic change has been the same for a hundred thousand years—after all, mutations can change a given sequence into a 'hot-spot' for further mutations. Also, more importantly, a change might give a survival advantage, and this would disrupt the statistical assumptions being made. In fact, such 'non-neutral' changes also allow tracking of population movements, most notably in the migration from Northern to Central and Southern America; a story that, like many others, Wells has no breath to tell.

With all this, the tenor of the book does not, by and large, live up to the quote from Brecht (from *The Life of Galileo*) with which Wells starts his journey, about science setting

limits on infinite error rather than offering infinite wisdom. In fact, definitiveness of style leads Wells into egregious errors, some more serious than others. Thus, for example, Wells starts off by claiming that creation myths answer the child's question of 'where we come from' and that they are at the 'core' of all religions, which trivializes the child's question as well as the complex cultural context of creation myths and the manifold ambiguities in the genesis of organized religion. Even in the arena of his own choosing, of population genetics, he is oddly careless. Thus, 'the biggest question is why they are living in such remote locations—how did they get there?': these are two separate questions, with answers that are probably independent despite some overlap of context. To conflate motive with means is strange indeed in a professional natural scientist. Similarly, Wells says that the accepted definition of a species is the ability to produce young, but that should properly be the ability to produce fertile young, since hybrid sterile 'mules' as offspring between species are not at all impossible.

More subtly, Wells misunderstands, in common with many other natural scientists, the full scope of the debate between the pro- and anti-Darwinians with which he opens his story, having Bishop Wilberforce ask rhetorically if it was possible he was related to a monkey. Yet, the same church that was arguing against Darwinism in the nineteenth century had had far less trouble a century earlier accommodating one of its own, Karl Linnaeus, when he wrote that the orang-utan and

From its African origin, the species spread first, some sixty thousand years ago, along the coast of the Arabian Sea, the Indian and the Pacific oceans as far as Australia. In a second movement fifty thousand-odd years back, West Asia was populated, followed by movements into Central Asia, and thence into Eastern Europe, China and South Asia. Native American (Amerindian) communities moved from North-Eastern Asia across the Bering bridge only about fifteen thousand years ago. We are one people and we come from Africa—no races, despite the centuries of pseudoscientific mumbo-jumbo to the contrary.

humans were simply two different species of the same genus. While not related to the central issue of his book, it is depressing that Wells does not see the possibility that the debate over Darwinism was to do in part with the *ethical* nature of humans. It is sadly ironic that a student of Richard Lewontin, a major figure in the battle against 'social Darwinian' ethics, overlooks these interpretative possibilities, and one begins to feel that much is missed in the drum-roll of a steady-march-of-enlightenment that Wells so enthusiastically embraces.

However, it is not my case that any of my reservations and criticisms are fatal objections for Wells' thesis. I emphatically think that the thesis is very likely to be valid. Nor do I think that the scientific comprehension of the world does not get less and less inaccurate with time. But the absence of effective explanation of the ambiguities of the scientific endeavour helps create idiotically triumphalist notions of what 'science' is, and can do, notions that deeply damage the fabric of science and rationality already under fanatic attack.

Wells offers an explanation of why the title is seemingly gender-specific (as in 'The Journey of Man', rather than, say, 'The Human Journey'). The main thrust of the book, he says, deals with genetic information emerging from studies of the variation of the DNA sequences in the Y chromosome, the famous one that men have and women don't. The singularity of the Y chromosome, as Wells takes pains to describe, is, of course, a major advantage in using sequence data from the Y chromosome. All other chromosomes come in pairs, and the pairs tend to get mutually scrambled a little in each generation, complicating the reliability of tracking the periodic errors in genetic duplication with which such heritage-tracking studies are currently done. This is all quite correct so far as it goes. But the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequence is also such an 'unpaired chromosome', which is strictly maternally inherited; so why not use that too, in the telling of the tale? Wells does use mtDNA information as well, although not as extensively as information from his main focus, the Y chromosome. Why does he do this? Wells has been involved, over recent years, in studies of population genetics using the Y chromosome, and the story he is telling is about the adventures of the groups that he has been associated with.

Fair enough, one would think; parochial preferences are not crimes. Do they do any real disservice to the sweep of the story that Wells is attempting to tell, in which individual ancestral men sow their wild oats far and wide? Indeed, yes. In the absence of sophisticated attempts to correlate the 'male' and 'female' DNA sequence heritage in the most informative situations known to date, Wells' claim to discussing the implications in terms of 'sexual politics' in later

chapters falls far short of satisfaction. This is disappointing, for the story of sexual politics that DNA sequence studies are beginning to reveal is perhaps even more fascinating than the glorious male march across the continents that Wells is trying to picture for us. As an example close at home, there are indications that the strictly female mtDNA heritage in caste populations in India is more closely related to South-East Asian communities, while the rest of the genome, inherited from either both parents or from the father alone, is equally if not more related to Eurasian stock, and this becomes more and more striking the 'higher' one looks in the caste structure. The picture of groups of men organized in a birth-based caste system 'appropriating' women of other, perhaps older communities is unavoidable, and I would have thought that such stories would be of interest to Wells while talking about human migrations. But the triumphant march of the Y chromosome deafens one, I suppose, to subtler sounds. One begins to wonder if any of this is evidence of political naivete, or of cracks in a façade of political rectitude.

Why am I saying this? Wells endears himself (to me, at least) at the outset by adding a quip to his dedication about Y-chromosomes being overrated anyway, and this political rectitude crops up again and again in the book. However, it is visible most of the time as a naively earnest desire to be 'careful' and not hurt 'sensibilities', rather than as part of a sophisticated awareness of the complex ambiguities inherent in 'looking for origins'. Thus, 'Adam' and 'Eve' shape the discourse, with no awareness that the terms are specific to a single cultural tradition, and that very different creation myths from many other traditions can be equally well 'retro-fitted' into new paradigms. Even more curiously (and foolishly), Wells refers to 'Western science', as though there were some (no doubt inferior) version called 'Eastern science', negating the pious truisms elsewhere in the book about the international character of the scientific endeavour. It all begins to take on the slightly surreal air of Anglo-American claims of 'bringing democracy to Iraq', where credibility strains at the seams and the missiles and tanks (and oil refineries) show through the rents.

Looking back at what I have written, I wonder if I am being churlish, for I am afraid my sense of pleasure at having read a good book does not come through the welter of my criticism. Nonetheless, the criticism is seriously meant, so I will not change what I have said. Instead, I will add only this: if you have ever turned and watched as the sea progressively obliterated your footprints in the sand, this book will be compulsive reading for you. ■

Satyajit Rath is a biologist at the National Institute of Immunology, New Delhi.

A Time for Specifics, not Generalizations

Ghazala Shahabuddin

BATTLES OVER NATURE: SCIENCE AND THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION
 Edited by Vasant Saberwal and Mahesh Rangarajan
 Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002, pp. 412, Rs. 695.00

Is the problem of wildlife conservation today principally one of science or of politics? This question, dominates a landmark book on Indian wildlife conservation called *Battles over Nature: Science and the Politics of Conservation*. The book consists of a collection of articles by a set of people from diverse backgrounds who have distinguished themselves in the study and practice of biodiversity conservation including biologists, sociologists, political scientists, forest managers and historians. The book is edited jointly by M. Rangarajan and V. Saberwal who are well-known for their scholarly work in the areas of wildlife history and political ecology, respectively.

Although there have been several books on wildlife conservation during the last decade, *Battles over Nature* treads a new path with its synthesis, insight and objectivity and taxonomic and geographic range that has been covered. The defining characteristic of the book is the sincere attempt to find middle ground in the current climate of increasing polarization in the 'People vs Wildlife' debate.

The primary theme of this book is the role of biologists in the way wildlife conservation has been played out in this country ever since the late-sixties, when biodiversity conservation was first acknowledged to be a serious enough issue that a separate governmental department was created for it. The key question is: can scientists provide solutions for conservation in this increasingly fragmented and disturbed world? Have scientists been mere players or pawns in the hands of exclusivist wildlifers or have they a real role to play in resolving conflicts over resource use?

The role of wildlife scientists has increasingly come under question in the global conservation arena. In *Battles Over Nature*, the approach of scientists to conservation questions over the years, has been analysed by scholars from a variety of backgrounds including the eminent historians Mahesh Rangarajan and Ramchandra Guha and ecologist-sociologist Sharad Lele.

In his chapter, Mahesh Rangarajan points out the historically indispensable role of wildlife biologists and nature-lovers in nature conservation: documenting species and habitats, studying sources of threat to wild areas and forging partnerships for environmental education and conservation. Without dedicated biologists as Raman Sukumar and Salim Ali, who could have understood the role of forest

continuity in elephant migrations or the role of habitat heterogeneity in maintaining the incredible diversity of Indian birds? In other chapters too, the necessity of scientific studies in solving human-wildlife conflicts has been brought out. Madhusudan and Mishra analyse the biological basis for human conflict with large mammals including elephants, large carnivores and others and find that solutions are possible only when we can understand what compels large mammals to intrude and disrupt human activities. Borges writes eloquently on the need to strengthen the scientific basis for understanding the impact of habitat fragmentation and human use of wild habitats, using her long-term research in the Western Ghats. Borges also brings in the oft-neglected issue of the protection of insects and other smaller creatures which are often assumed to be protected along with larger animals though they often have very different habitat needs and may be far more selective in their use of plant resources compared to larger animals. Rahmani, the famous ornithologist, also strongly supports the importance of science in resolving conservation conflicts in western India, in his account of how grass harvest practices can be neatly combined with conservation of the endangered floricans and bustards in wild grasslands, through proper management planning and enforcement.

Guha, through his scathing and thought-provoking critique of Indian wildlife biologists, points out the prejudiced way in which they have often approached conservation questions. He writes about the traditionally negative attitude of scientists towards local people, their discounting of the importance of cultural traditions in conservation and the all-encompassing view that people are bad for wildlife. Lele does a commendable job of pointing out the dangers in operationalizing the concept of sustainability. However, one wishes that Guha and Lele had had a more constructive approach in their critique of quantitative science. Both of them teeter dangerously on the verge of deeming all science and scientists as irrelevant for conservation without any qualifications whatsoever. For example, Lele questions the very concept of sustainability, whether it can be defined at all. Are they throwing the baby out with the bathwater? After all, don't we need a common language that can be used to resolve conflicts over resource use and isn't quantitative science, with all its shortcomings, the only way to go about doing that?

One of the heated debates in wildlife conservation circles today, and discussed much in *Battles Over Nature*, is whether human use can ever be compatible with biodiversity conservation. Although many biologists feel that ecosystem structure and function may be seriously compromised by even the slightest of human uses, there is a growing feeling among many others, that some amount and types of human use can be compatible with the aims of biodiversity conservation. *Battles Over Nature* provides not one but a variety of answers to the above problem. Both Borges and Rodgers *et al* find that most kinds of human use clearly cause damage when carried out without any controls. Rodgers *et al.* document the impacts of human settlements inside Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. Borges documents local extinction of a moss species in Bhimashankar Sanctuary due to intensification of collection by local tribals over the years, a practice that must have been sustainable at a time when human populations were small and scattered.

It is clear from the accounts in this section that the key to resolving the issue of sustainable use is primarily controlling the intensity of human use and secondarily, modifying the techniques adopted for resource extraction. Above all, the accounts show that there are few generalities that can be drawn and fewer still extrapolations possible from one site to another. Rather, one would need to go into the specifics of the situation to come up with feasible solutions to the issue of sustainable extraction.

There are a number of chapters in this book that go into the important role of community-based approaches to deal with the problem of conflict over natural resources. Of late, a number of community-based conservation programmes have been experimented with in India, the most prominent being the eco-development effort that was initiated in eight different protected areas, scattered over India. Three chapters go into the practical and other issues behind community-based conservation approaches, including ecodevelopment.

B.M.S. Rathore, in his piece on the process of community-based conservation in the famous Rajaji National Park, shows how time-consuming and painstaking the process has to be, if any long-term results are to be achieved in the process of reaching a consensus on the use of a place or management objectives for a place. At the same time, a thorough grounding in the cultural and ecological aspects of a site are necessary to make a change of any sort. Baviskar documents the entire process of ecodevelopment in Great Himalayan National Park and points out the repeated mistakes and mismanagement due to which the process did not yield any result, in spite of the expenditure of several crores of rupees. Drawing lessons

from this example, she advocates academic and political sincerity, accountability, issue-based planning and socio-cultural familiarity, if one is to achieve any long-term balance between the needs of local people and wildlife conservation.

Rodgers *et al* also do an objective analysis of the problems associated with community-based conservation, using a number of examples from Africa. They very candidly point out why simply 'handing over to communities' is not a solution, as is proposed by a number of grassroots-level NGO's today. True, there has to be devolution of power but it has to be conditional and subject to controls so that power is not abused by dominant groups and that wildland use is sustainable. Local communities also need help, simultaneously, for creating channels for economic and material improvement, removal of pressure on wild habitats, and strengthening their own institutional structures so as to create some amount of local-level accountability.

In this section, some difficult issues concerning sustainable use by people living in and around protected areas, have been overlooked. For example, ensuring a sustainable pattern of resource use from a wildlife sanctuary, as is suggested by many conservationists, necessarily means that one would have to start controlling the way a local village develops, including controls on immigrations, population growth, development, and changes in lifestyle. Is it realistic to expect that such restrictions on people's lives can be imposed in a democratic society?

The most important function of this book is to suggest ways out of the current imbroglio using the rich experience of Indian conservationists, scientists and grassroots-level groups during the last three decades. What comes out clearly from the book is first, the necessity of evolving a social consensus on the values of a wild area that need to be conserved. Middleton's chapter on Bharatpur shows how the main management objectives of a National Park relating to conservation, can be obscured by the heated conflict over resources. It does appear that bringing about a common sense of purpose among the various players in today's conservation debate, may in fact, be the first step in effecting successful long-term conservation in India.

An important contribution of *Battles Over Nature* is to point out the need to recognize that every 'conflict zone' is obviously unique in ecology, culture and socio-economic aspects. What works as a solution for one area may not necessarily work for another. Thus a combination of different initiatives in a single place is more likely to be successful rather than a blanket approach encompassing all areas. For example, in some areas, wildlife tourism may be more likely to succeed as a sustainable development activity for local people, while in

others, it may not, purely due to varying circumstances related to species biology, public accessibility and local language.

The other important step forward, contributed by *Battles Over Nature*, is to demonstrate the ways in which scientists can play a role in ameliorating human-wildlife conflict. The capacity of responsible science to play a valuable mediatory role, is amply brought out in the book. The kinds of issues that scientists can clearly help resolve are, for example, calculation of sustainable extraction limits for plant and animal resources, harmonization of agricultural land use with wildlife conservation, restoration of degraded lands into productive land uses or demarcating and prioritizing areas for biodiversity protection.

One wishes that the editors had gone one step further and attempted to suggest the exact mechanisms by which we can make some progress towards realistic wildlife conservation, in the Indian context. For example, what should be the mechanism for evolving a consensus regarding the management objectives of a wild area, involving stakeholders that cut across socio-economic strata, user-groups and governmental departments? What steps should be taken to institutionalize the incorporation of the results of scientific research into local implementation efforts by local people, forest department and NGO's? How does one go about making a change in the fiscal sector so that economic benefits from a wild area can be fed directly into local development and conservation management? How do we confront the equity issues at the macro-scale, especially the urban-rural divide, in how much people pay for conservation? How do we make our scientific research more directly applicable to on-field intervention and what would be the changes in scientific institutions to necessitate these changes?

Battles Over Nature is truly a rich compendium: it has brought together a vast range of historical, economic and scientific issues to confront the complex problems in wildlife conservation. Its most important contribution, to my mind, is its clear message that there can be no easy answers to our biodiversity conservation problems. Only a diversity of approaches, firmly grounded in the realities of site-specific ecology, history and socio-economic change, can possibly alleviate the increasing human-wildlife conflict in India and secure a safe future for biodiversity on which our common future depends. It is clearly time to go into specifics, not continue to hover in the diffuse realm of generalities. ■

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A Total Palette of Alternatives?

Dilip M. Menon

PENUMBRAL VISIONS: MAKING POLITIES IN EARLY MODERN SOUTH INDIA

By Sanjay Subrahmanyam

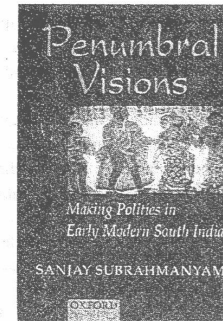
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp.xi+295, Rs. 595.00

The writing of history in India is at an impasse for several reasons. The first is a problem both of insularity and universal pretensions. Historians working on Bengal presume that they are writing about India. Those working on eastern U.P. and Bihar believe that they are working on north India, and therefore about India. The few working on south India, regardless of the fact whether they study one region or five are seen as working on south India. And of course, no one reads the historiography of regions other than their own, leaving it to scholars abroad to produce what are in their own opinion masterly syntheses which are then greeted with cries of "this is not true for Medinipur". Where, in the 19th century, it was our cotton for their textiles, now we export facts and import theory. This is the source of the second problem. Historians have always been (if not of a rank Rankean disposition) aware of Althusser's jibe that they possess not so much a theory as a methodology of history. Hence the compelling desire to be *au fait* with the latest on the unreality of the real while remaining ignorant of what Sanjay Subrahmanyam would call "connected histories" i.e. thinking South East Asia, South Asia, the Levant, the Americas and Europe together within a time frame. The important proposition that this book puts forward is that we need to conceptualize the idea of the "early modern" where one takes the task of provincializing Europe more seriously than just making a flamboyant theoretical gesture.

Subrahmanyam puts forward four propositions which rethink the intellectually lethargic view of a world outside Europe shaped by a spectre called the Enlightenment (more often theoretically rendered as the *endarkenment*). We are prone to characterizing the period from 1400 onwards as an era of exploration but framing it within the idea of the expansion of Europe. Instead we need to emphasize the expansion of "cultures of travel" and the growth of cartographies and ethnographic knowledge which puts Zheng He's Indian Ocean voyages in the early 15th century alongside the better known and later travels of Magellan *et al.* Second, he suggests that there was a heightening of the long term conflict between settled agricultural societies and nomadic groups so that one is looking at "universal conflicts during the period in life-styles, and modes of resource-use." Third, we have come to associate the ideas emanating

from Europe in its age of expansion with the notion of the Universal; that they were the first to rehearse, institute and propagate Empire, State and Liberty. This arises from a peculiar historical amnesia towards the world before the idea of Europe. Subrahmanyam asks that we take seriously notions of universal empire present within the Chinggis Khanid-Timurid tradition, pre-Columbian America, Southern and Central Africa. Later imaginings, whether of the Hapsburgs or indeed of Great Britain need to be placed within a trajectory arising from these "pre-existent and autonomous notions of empire." Last of all, the very notions of "universalism and humanism" have local renditions which need to be explored as much as "regimes of historicity" (*pace* Hartog) within local traditions. This is to say the very least an ambitious intellectual programme beyond the ken of most historians for whom a language and a region satisfy their appetites; Alexanders they would rather not be.

Penumbral Visions begins with the contrasting histories of the conquest of Mexico and the slow inroads of the Europeans in south India. Within Portuguese discourse in India, Tirupati came to acquire the unlikely status of El Dorado, characterized as much by a fabulous wealth as bloody human sacrifice and an abject and prostrate body of worshippers. The man who would be Cortes was the Governor of the Portuguese empire in Asia, Martim Afonso de Sousa from 1541, a fierce *conquistadore* like figure in the New World but a decidedly Quixotic figure in the ill-fated "pagoda voyage" to raid Tirupati and carry off its gold. The story begins with preparations to repel a possible Ottoman raid on Goa, which does not materialize, leaving the question of what was to be done with the 2500 men and 200 cavalry ready and waiting. The backup plan of attacking San Tome is shelved since it is learnt that Aravidu Rama Raya has forces ready on the south east coast and Afonso would meet with stiff resistance unlike the experience of the New World. Therefore, Martim Afonso decides to attack from the south west and move inland to Tirupati (an appalling combination of ruggedness of purpose and ignorance of terrain). He lands at Kollam, much to the surprise of the locals, and forces his way inwards to the temple of Tevelekkara where after gathering some loot and facing a lot of resistance he retreats. This could very well serve as a metaphor for understanding European conquest in India, less as a



clinical superiority (attended by terms such as technological revolution and military fiscalism) and more as a contingent surfacing from within embroilments both political and financial.

It is in the discussion of Tirupati itself within the European discourse that Subrahmanyam questions many of the popular and lazy assumptions that underlie the notion of a 'colonial discourse' characterized by that umbrella epithet Orientalism. While Gaspar de Correia's description of the August festival in Tirupati emphasizes that "they decapitate before the pagoda house, goats, sheep and lambs and kids, more than a million of livestock..." it is not born of horror alone but also a comparison with popular Christianity. By 1602, Tirupati is being written about as being "like another Rome". While there is a critique of wasteful luxury and consumption, it does not arise only from the creation of an Other but a reflection on the practices within Christianity itself. By the Dutch and the English, Tirupati is also understood politically as a milch cow for the state: a report to the Dutch governor of Pulicat states that the representative of the ruler of Golkonda had taken as a present for Shahjahan "two outstanding emeralds" that had belonged to Lord Venkatesa.

Within the political landscape of south India, Tirupati is accorded no absolute religious status with Clive and Duplex as much as local Telugu Brahmins and bankers deploying its resources for mundane purposes. Subrahmanyam invites us to look at what he calls the "prehistory of Orientalism" within which one cannot easily distinguish between "Protestant" and "Catholic" representations any more than "Dutch" views and "Portuguese" views. There was, he observes, a constant "dialectic between lived experience and empirical observation" and very often what appears as Orientalist fantasy may have been the partial representations by native informants.

When historians talk about a European discourse, there is too the analytical problem of assuming that what gets published as a text crystallizes as a hegemonic interpretation and "rumours from the bazaar" do not. In the case of Jesuit reports on Mysore, the descriptions

that are akin to "political ethnography" are constructed with an ear to the ground and the collection of contingent and transient information.

Mysore has emerged within recent historiography as the strongest contender to the East India Company by having prefigured the winning strategy of military fiscalism. However, what has remained hazy in this picture is the contours of the Wodeyar regime that preceded the war state under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan. Subrahmanyam looks at accounts by Italian and Portuguese Jesuits to fill in the details. What emerges is a picture of Mysore expanding in the wake of Mughal and Maratha extension: a reform of internal structure under external threat. A dependence on alliances with the Mughals and Marathas remains its weakness however as also a range of factors including a dependence on non-agricultural activities, short term infantry, garrisons controlled by wily Brahmins from elsewhere and field armies of no fixed consistency, including Afghans, Turks, Telugus. Questions of region and of regional ethnic composition are still undecided issues and the campaign against Kodagu is no more than a reaching out to the sea by a landlocked power, rather than an expansion of regional boundaries.

Two important themes surface here: the role of the Maharashtrian Brahmin in Mysore and the role of firearms in campaigns. In the account of the campaign by the *diwan* at Arcot against Dodda Krishnaraja, the surrender of Melukote was seen as a result of Brahmin stratagem and when in 1725, Kumara Krishnayya dies after removal from the post of *sarvadhikari*, it is widely believed that foreign Brahmins are behind his death by poisoning. For a few days men on the streets of Srirangapatnam threw Brahmins they encountered on the streets into the river with stones tied around their necks.

Subrahmanyam discounts the role of a military technological revolution in the 18th century pointing out that from the Nayaka period there had been ambivalence towards firearms and their association with an anonymous rather than a heroic death. Joaquim Dias's description of the siege of Srirangapatnam is apposite. He says that the "cannons existed only to decorate the fortress" and that the governor of the city had given orders to the women to boil *kanji* instead and throw it on the enemies. Good specialist artillerymen were hard to find in a time of financial stringency as well. This emphasis on a "brute and shifting empirical reality" allows us to escape the vision of a rising graph of a military revolution. Very often artillery had to be abandoned in the face of a cavalry charge or in the forests of Kodagu where Mysore won the battles but lost the war on account of the terrain.

In the essay on the Nawwabi state of Arcot, Subrahmanyam explores the political context

of shifting mercantile fortunes and emphasizes that the world of inland politics was not an independent determinant of the rise and fall of trading systems. The emergence and decline of "successor states" like Arcot in the wake of Mughal expansion to the south cannot be explained solely in terms of an internal profligacy or incompetence. In 1688, Aurangzeb had detached 12 *sarkars* (five under *suba* Karnatak and seven under *suba* Karnatak Payyanghai) south of the Gundalakamma river and placed them under a separate *faujdar*. Both here as well as further south revenue had to be collected through revenue farmers and large amounts of *jama* had to be alienated to persuade local notables to support the Mughals. In the 1690's, Kumara Yachama Naidu of the Recherla clan was given the *jagir* of Venkatagiri, Tirupati and Nellore yielding 2.5 million rupees *jama* and a *mansab* of 6000/6000 for his allegiance. Apart from persuasion though blandishment, considerable revenue was set aside for troop maintenance, the Karnatak being a frontier area. The Mughals like Bijapur before them did not ever succeed in displacing autochthonous lineages in the area. As Arcot emerged as a power centre from 1700, Saadatullah Khan attempted to settle the Payyanghai region and bring in Khatri to manage the revenue; the *Said nama* of Jaswant Rai Munshi mentions Lala Dakhni Rai in particular.

While the idea of a frontier state continued, with annual *peshkash* gathering expeditions, there was a new wave of market building and an attempt to set up Arcot as a courtly centre with gardens and a royal style marked by charity. By the mid 18th century the presence of the European traders, particularly the English, determined the fate of commerce and ports. Both Daud Khan Panni's attempt to redevelop San Thome as a port through settling Indo-Afghan traders there as well as Sa'adatullah Khan's project of converting Kowalam into Saadat Pattan in 1717 as an alternative to the hat wearers (*kulab-poshan*) were doomed to failure. All of this was too much and too late as maritime trade and the ports were denied by the European stranglehold. As maritime commerce came to be monopolized by the English, Arcot came to be redefined within the paradigm of an agrarian frontier zone alone. The ocean came to be written out, its history as nothing more than a failed venture, rather than a result of exclusion by European power.

The masking of European intervention through the representation of indigenous regimes as internally corrupt and wasteful is evident in the Tanjore Commissioner's Report of 1799. So we have the picture of Thanjavur under the Bhonsles from (1676-1799) as a state much atrophied from the time of the *Shahendravilasa* that depicted an Aurangzeb rendered disconsolate by the victory drums of Shahaji (1684-1711). What was crucial in Thanjavur's decline was what came to be called

the *Haidarkalapam* or the depredations of Haidar Ali in the 1780s. Between 1779 and 1789 the population dropped by 35% with more than half the population 'disappearing' (deceased/migrating) in areas like Sirkali and Mayavaram. By early 1790s in an attempt to restore revenue collection, the institution of *pathakam* or revenue farming was started and there were about 225 *pathakams* all over Thanjavur. The commissioner's report suggests that the majority of the revenue farmers were drawn from *mirasidars* (of whom in 1805, two thirds were Sudras some with 3-4000 acres of land). However, within the discourse of the Commissioner's report, the institution of revenue farming is not seen as a contingent, historical response to an agrarian crisis but the symbol of an unholy alliance between the new class of *pathakadar* and the older power holders (the *kavalkkararar*) to defraud the state of revenue and "oppress the inhabitants." A high proportion of land in Thanjavur was held in *inam*, a continuation of the Nayaka tradition of choultries and feeding the wise, virtuous and indigent. With the assumption of Thanjavur by the British, the institution of revenue farming was done away with but the gross revenue realized did not increase significantly. The solvency of Thanjavur after 1799 arose from decreased expenditures rather than from increased revenues. The fiscal problems arose from maintaining an army that they could ill afford but which in the period was necessary as a state accessory, as also in the case of Arcot, a constricted access to the sea.

The last two essays deal with the more theoretical issues raised in the introduction regarding traditions of history writing in south India, what Subrahmanyam calls a "total palette of alternatives." Nunes' account written in the 16th century recounts a history in which south India is invaded by a king of Delhi in 1230 when Vijayanagara is presumed to exist in the text; neither of which is "factual". In writing of the founding of Vijayanagara, the fable of the dogs and the hares and the sage Vidyaranya who explicates the inner meaning of the incident appear. The text is "hybrid" in nature sharing both the narrative paradigm of a European discourse and the imaginary of indigenous "history". Then there is the *Kumara Ramuni Katha*, set in Kampili and Anegondi which through the story of Kumara Rama and his twin Polika Rama (his "false" other) narrates notions of ideal kingship while engaging with "history" in speaking of an attack on Prataparudra Kakatiya by the brothers and the incursion of a Sultan of Delhi into the region. The Sultan, in a strange twist, wins against the two heroic brothers because he is under Lord Rama's protection. This is a fascinating text which Subrahmanyam does not analyse in any detail, except to make the throwaway remark that the *katha* "is a proposal, an anonymous one to be sure, surely arisen from within the folk-milieu, concerning

how the past of a part of south India might be read." In footnotes he takes umbrage with the notion of ethnography and also states that his enterprise is different from that of the work done on history writing in 18th century Bengal by Partha Chatterjee, but it is not entirely clear what Subrahmanyam is proposing through the descriptive account of several texts.

This chapter is by far the most unsatisfying, since not much is done with the wealth of narrative strategies and imaginations that Subrahmanyam has unearthed. So when he discusses the *Tuzak-i-Walajabi*, he mentions the coexistence of dynastic chronicle, accounts of Columbus and a history of England in the 18th century within the text as also more marvelous episodes as the amulet used by Mohammad Said to draw Aurangzeb's attention to himself at the Mughal court. However, we get no discussion on how these elements are articulated within the text or indeed what effects they generate.

In the discussion of the *Karnataka rajakkal savistara caritiram*, we get a description of the complex levels within the text beginning as it does in a Puranic mode 4900 years earlier and then adopting the conventions of Indo-Persian historiography when speaking of the creation of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. The text has elements of hagiography in the account of Ramanuja and his influence in converting the daughter of the *padshah* of Delhi to Vaishnavism. Subrahmanyam does occasionally raise insightful questions regarding the sequence of events in the text: are they to be seen as internal moments in the text, or do they refer to historical fact? Hence we have the instance of Tuppacki Krishnappa, a 17th century figure who is placed in the 16th century by the author. Apart from the description of various narrative traditions within the text itself and the inference of heteroglossia, this essay can only be seen as a preliminary gesture in Subrahmanyam's effort to counter the traditional charge that India lacks a historical tradition and the more modern one that it was the Enlightenment project and modernity that brought History to India.

The last essay in the volume is by far the most speculative and one wishes that Subrahmanyam would occasionally stand back from the fascination with the unusual material that he unearths and engage in more historiographical speculation. He takes issue with the Aligarh school's paradigm of a moribund pre-colonial India idea with modernity being inaugurated only in the 18th century after a long medieval period stretching from the 12th century. Understanding the reality of caste identities may involve studying them historically less as part of a "system" and more as "anchorage of a certain malleability." Moreover, as Cynthia Talbot's work on the Telugu region, between the 12th and 14th century, has shown, *jati* was not mentioned as much as lineage, family and personal prowess. Again

ideas such as the "public sphere" being conditioned by rules of entry derived from caste may have to be rethought once one moves towards a study of the circulation of non-printed texts along the "information highways" of south India. Even the supposed modernity of notions of the distinction between public and private may not survive a reading of the Sangam literature and its essential dichotomy of *akam* and *puram*.

The Nayaka period as the collaborative work of Subrahmanyam with Narayana Rao and Shulman has shown, inaugurated a personalized idiom of rule, notions of divine kingship, a celebration of being Sudra and a downgrading of the Brahmin from the receiver of *brahmadeya* to the object of *annadanam*. In a subtle analysis of a text written by Shahaji Bhonsle (r.1684-1711), titled *Satidanashuramu*, or the gifting of a virtuous wife, all these themes are brought together. Shahaji wrote the text for performance in the temple festival at Mannargudi, and Subrahmanyam stresses that we need to expand the notion of public sphere to include forms of public life coalescing in festivals and get away from the reductionism of seeing temples as religious centres alone. The story concerns a Brahmin who comes to the festival, falls in love with a lower caste Madiga woman, attempts to persuade her through specious logic that untouchability does not pose a problem for concupiscence, and insists that union is preferable to the "insipid bliss" of learning and asceticism. Her Madiga husband lectures the Brahmin in Sanskrit before generously gifting his wife to him. The appearance of Lord Shiva on the scene sorts out the tangle. Meanwhile, the king has raised subversive thoughts on the social order within a mixed caste audience at a religious festival: questions of hierarchy, individualism and the miscibility of the religious and secular are being debated openly within a "pre-modern" order.

One can see here the aptness of Subrahmanyam's wry and ironic remark that there are "advantages of relative backwardness" in the fact that historians of south India can pay more attention to literary and cultural production in the writing of history while north Indian historiography remains within the grip of a dreary recounting of fiscal matters. This collection of essays is characterized by the author's usual acerbic, polemical style and phenomenal range of reading, but one wishes that the book had taken up more seriously the ambitious and provocative agenda set out in the introduction and conclusion. But for that dear reader, we have to read the entire oeuvre of Sanjay Subrahmanyam who like Parashurama of yore slays generations of earlier scholarship while recovering virgin land from the sea for future inhabitation. ■

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Contemporary Aspects of Sufism

Margrit Pernau

MUSLIM SHRINES IN INDIA: THEIR CHARACTER, HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Edited by Christian Troll
Oxford University Press, Delhi, reprint with an introduction by Marc Gaborieau, 2003,
pp. 327+XXXIV, Rs. 445.00

Muslim Shrines edited by Christian Troll, the German Jesuit and renowned scholar on Islam, was first published in 1989. Since then it has been regarded as a milestone in the research on theological, ethnographic, historical and contemporary aspects of Sufism on the Indian subcontinent.

Thirteen articles by a wide range of renowned scholars present a rich variety of information, many of them chalking out the path for further research. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui traces the history of the early Chishti Dargahs from original records, emphasizing particularly the impact which royal patronage had for the development of a shrine. For the case of the Dargah of Moin ud Din Chishti this thesis is modified by S.A.I Tirmizi, who presents a calendar of Mughal documents relating to this shrine, by means of which he claims that the fame of this place predates Mughal patronage. The importance for future research of such a listing of source material can hardly be exaggerated – however, as the original documents are beyond the reach of most of the readers, short summaries and a more extensive conclusion would have been helpful.

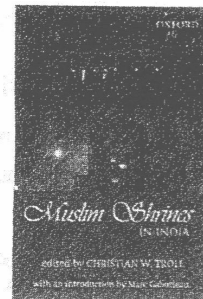
The topic of the impact of politics on the shrines and the use of the shrines in politics is taken up in Muhammad Ishaq Khan's article on the symbolic value which was ascribed to the Dargah of Hazratbal in Srinagar for the preservation of a distinct historical identity of Kashmiri Muslims, notably by Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference. Elisabeth Mann probes into the extremely important—and all too often neglected—question of the bases for the shrines' power, which she finds not only in the spiritual field, but also in the temporal, in the administration of land and money. These investigations of the worldly role of the Dargahs and its influence on the relation between the Pirs and their followers, constitute a very important path for future research.

Two images of the Sufi saints prevail in the contemporary Indian discourse. One centers on the opposition between the ulama and the mystics and depicts the Sufis as the "soft" and peaceful side of Islam, as saintly persons, who renounce influence, wealth and worldly concerns and minister to the spiritual needs of all classes of people. They are seen as the living symbols for India's composite culture and constructed into icons of national integration. The other one, which is more rarely found in academic writings, but all the more often in

film and literature, portrays the Pirs as frauds, who make a living out of the popular superstitions and do not hesitate to use their substantial power for their own good. The mentioned articles show that a serious study of the this-worldly role of the Sufis and their political and economic influence, is not only necessary, but also possible.

Tahir Mahmood describes the legend, traditions and present day situation of the popular shrine of Sayyid Salar Mas'ud Ghazi in Bahraich, a shrine renowned for providing a meeting ground between Hindu and Muslim religious practices and for that reason attacked by reformers from the days of Aurangzeb to the present. The question of syncretism, religious boundaries and liminality has been intensively discussed in the last few years – it would now seem the right time for a reconsideration of the shrines as the focal points of a popular and unorthodox Islam. Probably the opposition of a popular and an elitist culture, and by implication the location of the popular in the shrines, can no longer be held up. After all, the theological literature produced by the Sufis is no less of a highly elaborated intellectual system than the writings of the scholars. Nor can the easy dichotomy between orthodox ulama and heterodox Sufis remain unquestioned, if social scientists want to avoid privileging the theological definition of Islamic orthodoxy by just one group of reformist Muslims. In their own eyes, the Sufis represent the true Islamic path, based on the Quran and the Sunna, just as much, if not more than the ulama. How then does the elitist and the popular interact within the culture of the shrines? Through what channels are the teachings of the Sufis transmitted to the masses, which transformations occur during this process, and how are they legitimized theologically? How, on the other hand, is this teaching perceived and adapted by those who are at the receiving end? These would be some of the questions further research would have to take up.

Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moin, Paul Jackson and Desiderio Pinto provide detailed descriptions of the present day rituals and communications at the shrines of Ajmer, Patna and Nizam ud Din. This information is perhaps even more important today than for those generations who still lived the close interaction between the religious communities, which would provide them with first hand knowledge on each others' traditions, customs and



festivals. An interesting topic, which unfortunately is not addressed in this context, would be a detailed investigation of the much acclaimed interaction of Hindus and Muslims within the shrines. Is the religious difference forgotten, once a person enters the dargah, to the extent of following the same rituals, coming on the same days and for the same occasions, praying the same prayers and receiving the same spiritual guidance? If, on the contrary, differences remain, how are they negotiated? What an image of each other do they imply?

The two articles by J.M.S. Baljon and Marc Gaborieau are brilliant examples of how much information a painstaking reading of often misquoted texts in the tradition of the school of Shah Waliullah of Delhi may yield, both as to their theological content as also to their historical place.

It may be regretted that Christian Troll's introduction is all too short and that he chooses only to let the articles and their authors speak for themselves. Marc Gaborieau's new introduction produces a valuable updating (including an extensive bibliography) on the themes the research on Muslim shrines has taken up in the last decade.

Keeping the production cost as low as possible is a legitimate concern for every publisher. However, careful copy-editing is certainly not the best place for economy, at least not for a publisher who has an academic reputation to defend. Throughout the book spelling mistakes are frequent, as well as mistakes which a cautious reading could easily have eliminated (e.g. Claudia Liebeskind is referred to as Patricia in the text, but correctly quoted in the references; Bahadur Shah is supposed to have visited a shrine in 710 A.H., about 200 years before the first Mughal even came to India; the footnote for p. 129 is given on p. 133, this page in turn contains references which are followed up by footnotes two pages later). And for a publisher to ask his reader for information on the contributors instead of providing them would seem funny, if it wasn't so annoying. ■

Margrit Pernau, Assistant Professor, University of Erfurt (Germany), is currently based in Delhi and working on Muslim identities in 19th century Shahjahanabad.

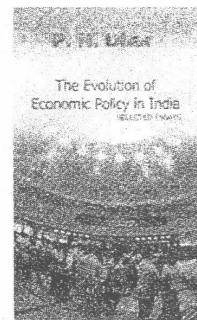
A Specialist's Collection

Mrinal Datta-Chaudhuri

THE EVOLUTION OF ECONOMIC POLICY IN INDIA: SELECTED ESSAYS

By P.N. Dhar

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 252, Rs. 525.00



Very few people have the credentials to bring out a collection of essays with the title of *The Evolution of Economic Policy in India*. P.N. Dhar is an outstanding member of that small group. Professor Dhar has been for nearly six decades a professional economist of unusual ability and high repute. He started his professional career as a teacher of economics, notably at the Delhi School of Economics. Later, he shifted to the Institute of Economic Growth as one of its leading researchers and eventually became its director in 1963. In between he spent a year in British Guiana (as Guyana was then called) as economic advisor appointed by the UN. In 1970 he joined the Government of India, first as advisor in, and soon afterwards as the head of, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's secretariat. He resigned from this position in 1977 when the Janata Government took office. A year later he joined the United Nations secretariat as Assistant Secretary-General in charge of development research and policy analysis. This unique sequence of career choices gave Dhar not only an invaluable perspective on the evolution of economic policy in India, and indeed a role in its making, but also a wider perspective on development policies on a worldwide basis.

The book consists of a newly written introduction and ten chapters and six appendices written between the late 1950s and mid-1990s. They have been reproduced here more or less as originally published. Only the last chapter seems to have undergone major revision. We thus have in this book an analysis of the 'evolution' (implying forward movement) of economic policy in India from the perspective of a single commentator, and that makes it both interesting and important.

What comes out clearly throughout this book is Dhar's sense of dismay on account of various missed opportunities and misguided strategic choices, which shackled the productive forces of the Indian economy, and burdened it with structural inefficiencies and wasteful behaviour. For the general readers, the first two essays of the book – the introduction and chapter 1 ('Evolution of Economic Policy: An Overview') – provide a lucid account of the author's overall judgement on critical aspects of economic policy in India. The readers will also find chapter 10 ('Epilogue: India and the World') interesting and thought-provoking. Here Dhar outlines his perceptions regarding what he calls, 'the economic, political and

security interests of the country...in their inter-relatedness'. These, indeed, are valuable observations of a man who was one of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's closest advisors. It is not surprising that his canvas is much larger than what a typical economist would normally choose for analysing the problems of economic policy.

It is not possible to discuss adequately the many issues raised in this rich collection of essays within the confines of a short review. Hence, at the risk of being somewhat unfair to the author, I shall adopt a highly selective approach. In any society economic policies emerge from three sets of factors: (a) ideas that guide the thinking of the policy-makers, (b) economic interests of the dominant groups in the polity; and (c) the national and the international environment in which policies get formulated. Dhar has been meticulous in outlining the 'environmental' issues. In this review I shall take some issues belonging to the first two categories.

Legacies of the independence movement left two sets of powerful ideas in the mindset of the policy planners in Independent India. One was associated with Gandhi and the other with Nehru. The former emphasized the importance of small-scale and village industries. The latter emphasized the need for rapid industrialization by pushing the public sector to the commanding heights of the economy.

P.N. Dhar first came into the limelight within the economics profession in India by publishing in 1961 (along with H.F. Lydall) the results of an empirically sound and analytically rigorous study on the role of small enterprises in India's economic development. This study still remains one of the best examples of empirical research in the field of economics in India. Although Appendix C contains a summary of the findings of the study, interested readers are advised to look up the original Dhar-Lydall monograph. That study conclusively demonstrated that small enterprises were inefficient and capital-intensive, and hence the proliferation of such enterprises was inimical to the objective of rapid employment generation in the country. Incidentally, it is rather ironic from the perspective of Gandhian thought that these activities could only survive with substantial help coming from diverse protectionist measures rigorously enforced by a powerful state machinery.

Much of Dhar's writings reproduced in this volume relate to the policy issues associated with Nehruvian ideas, which formed the basis of the overall development strategy adopted in India during the 1950s. The main plank of this strategy was state-sponsored industrial development with an expanding public sector and the regulation of private industries and foreign trade by direct controls. It is quite clear from these essays that Dhar had become skeptical of the efficacy of this strategy even in its early days. Readers will find a comprehensive articulation of his misgivings in chapter 8, which reproduces his V.T. Krishnamachari memorial lecture of 1989, entitled 'Constraints on Growth'. Here Dhar's point of departure was that although past performance had been poor, there was no reason that future performance also should be so. 'Our goals', he emphasized, 'have been and continue to be: creation of more productive employment, alleviation of poverty, the sustenance of democracy at home and stability and peace in South Asia. None of these objectives can be achieved without sufficient economic growth' (p.116). He forthrightly called for economic reforms and stressed the imperative of sound economic management. This was said in 1989.

Given my own research interests, I have found Dhar's 1968 essay on Centre-State relations and industrial development (chapter 5) both enlightened and illuminating. He clearly recognized the economic logic of efficient industrial growth over a geographical space, and strongly deplored the strategy of spreading thinly India's industrial development all over the country with the objective of reducing regional disparities. However, I was disappointed by his concluding remark that 'economic forces of disunion can be overcome only by stronger political forces' (p.88). I think, India should never have allowed politics to be in command in 'allocating' investable resources among the states. It never gave the political institutions at the higher state and the local levels the opportunity to learn the difficult skill of attracting investments in a competitive environment. But that would have required meaningful and credible

decentralization and devolution of power and authority, which the political elite of the country were unwilling to risk. That faultline in India's polity and economy unfortunately persists.

Another important essay in this collection is chapter 7, 'Political Economy of Development in India'. Here Dhar delves with enormous skill and insights into the basic intellectual problem in the study of a political economy, which is to understand why certain social choices are actually made. It is relatively easy to spell out the consequences of economic policies and to make normative judgement about them. It is much more difficult to analyse policy choices as the outcome of the interaction among the dominant interest groups in the economy. Limitations of space preclude a full discussion of Dhar's analysis in a meaningful way. I therefore strongly urge the readers to spend sometime on this chapter.

The foregoing remarks are illustrative of Dhar's range of interests, the nature of the analysis, and the bases of his critical judgements. I strongly recommend this collection of essays to professional economists, policy makers, and general readers. It is informative, thought-provoking, and elegantly written. This book tells us a great deal about the evolution of India's economic policy in the second half of the twentieth century, its objectives, priorities, and strategies, as also its strengths and achievements and its faults and failures. In Dhar's judgement, the latter have tended to outweigh the former. ■

Mrinal Datta-Chaudhuri is a former Professor, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi.

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Irresistible Relevance of 19th Century Economic Nationalism

Nasir Tyabji

INDIA AND THE WORLD ECONOMY 1850-1950 DEBATES IN INDIAN HISTORY AND SOCIETY
Edited by G. Balachandran
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, pp. xi+320, Rs 545 00

As India in the nineteenth century, as of now, was the recipient of impulses from the world economy, debate has centred on the effects of these impulses on the actual performance and the direction in which the economy was led by these impulses. In terms of a definition as good as any other, India, as overwhelmingly a recipient rather than an originator of international economic impulses, was and is a third world country. The essays in this book deal with the period from the mid 19th century, by which time India's role as a supplicant country was secure. Thus the question of how this formerly dominant force in world textile trade was reduced to a subordinate status does not form the subject of the discussion.

Apart from an Introduction by the Editor, the book consists of eight essays, all previously published but very useful to have in one place. It is interesting to note that apart from two contributions, by Sunanda Sen and the editor, all the pieces date from the late 1970s or early 1980s. How then do they form a part of contemporary debates, when the original arguments around which a number of papers are centred, actually originated with the 19th century nationalists, Naoroji, Dutt and Ranade?

The mystery is resolved by a sentence made in passing in the editor's opening remarks: the arguments of the nationalists were not intrinsically "right" or "wrong" though they evidently sit uncomfortably with some current fashions in Indian historiography. Fashion is a suggestive word here, because it accurately describes the nature of the debates around the nationalist position. Debate is, in fact, an inappropriate term because it implies an engagement with the substance of the evidence or argument which is now sought to be shown to be outmoded. A change in fashion, on the other hand, implies a discontinuity, a break with current norms of thinking while at the same time implying that this break takes place de novo, without serious engagement.

In this case the change of focus (the basis for the fashion) is made quite economically in K. N. Chaudhuri's opening paper. The nationalists in their concern with the drain of resources from India were preoccupied with welfare, with what would nowadays come under the rubric of welfare economics, while the proper study of the drain, assuming that

this existed at all, should lie in its effects on the balance of payments, and on national income. Accordingly, Chaudhuri points out that theoretically, the effect of international trade is to lower the return to the scarcer factor of production. As labour in 19th century India was (and is now) the more abundant factor, Chaudhuri remarks that it would be interesting to study the effects of imports which competed with Indian made goods (principally handicrafts) on capital rather than labour. The reader will note how attention is diverted from the effects of imports on the livelihoods of handicrafts persons, on which so much material was collected by nationalists and sympathetic European commentators, to a suggestion that studies be undertaken de novo on the effects of imports on capital. Thus, without earlier concerns having been shown to be exhaustively resolved, the basis for a new trend in fashion is laid.

Questions raised by the nationalists are, however, substantively discussed in papers by Sunanda Sen and by John McLane. There were four components of the drain identified by the nationalists which operated through the mechanism of the home charges levied on the Government of India (which, according to Sen themselves covered almost the entire amount of India's trade surplus). The items constituting home charges were on account of civil administration, defence, and on productive expenditure or the management of debt incurred to finance productive expenditure. Sen points out that about a third of this expenditure was incurred on account of the first two items, civil administration and defence, which could reasonably be held to constitute payments arising from India's colonial status. By no means then, it would appear, could the entire amount of home charges be treated as the drain, as claimed by the nationalists.

However, Sen has unearthed an extraordinary accounting device sanctioned by a Select Committee of the British Parliament, by which borrowing under the head of productive debt was used to cancel old unproductive debt, while actual public works expenditure was financed through current revenues. Over time, thus, outstanding loans incurred for productive purposes would rise continuously as a proportion of the total debt. Sen points out that unproductive debt was largely used to finance politically sensitive and commercially unviable



government expenditures. Thus, servicing of productive debt, which by 1913 accounted for two thirds of the home charges can be seen to be part of the drain as claimed by the nationalists, though they did this without supporting analysis. Rather a startling revelation!

Two other papers, by Amiya Bagchi and by the Editor, deal with the impact of the world depressions of 1873-1896, and that of the late 1920s and early 1930s on India. Interestingly, Bagchi's paper marks a restatement of the centrality of estimating the impact of international economic relations through the gains and losses for the people of a country. He does this by questioning the validity of conventional calculations of the terms of trade on people's incomes and livelihoods. His illustration, of how specific measures to deal with the effects of the depression resulted in the terrible famines of the late 19th century, is a telling example of the ways in which economic theory, if interpreted with historical and sociological imagination, can illuminate the underlying causes of apparently divinely wrought vengeance. Balachandran examines the more familiar case of the 20th century depression and brings out instances of abstract theory being used to defend policies clearly designed to serve imperial interests.

Other papers which are included in this valuable set of essays include Omkar Goswami's study of the peasant economy of North and East Bengal in the 1930s, B.R Tomlinson's account of the 1930-32 currency crisis, and Marcello de Cecco's more general essay on the problems of India's monetary policies. As can be seen, this is a specialist's book and requires effort on the part of the reader. However, with fashions flowing thick and fast, it behoves serious students of India's colonial past to fortify themselves with the rigorous analysis that this book contains. ■

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Changing Existential Conditions

Praveen Jha

CAPITAL AND LABOUR REDEFINED: INDIA AND THE THIRD WORLD

By Amiya Kumar Bagchi

Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 336, Rs. 575.00

Amiya Kumar Bagchi belongs to a relatively small group of scholars who straddle across the conventional disciplinary boundaries in social sciences with formidable achievements. In his well-known academic contributions spread over more than four decades now, Bagchi has distinguished himself as much in rummaging through the archival documents as an accomplished historian to illuminate the past, as in offering perceptive analysis of the contemporary development problems while wearing the hat of an economist or a political theorist. In part, travelling across disciplines is organically linked to a serious commitment to the methods of Marxian political economy; however, it obviously requires much more than simply a methodological commitment to come close to Bagchi's achievements, and this is where his attributes as a scholar contribute to his special stature.

The volume under review here, which is a select collection of essays written during the 1980s and 1990s, addresses some of the themes central to Bagchi's research efforts. As may be inferred from the title of the book, it is primarily about the changing existential conditions of capital and labour in a Third World context, drawing mainly on aspects of the Indian experience. At a time when much of the academic world has little inclination to address such concerns, and when many have been celebrating the alleged consignment of Marxism to the dustbin of history, publication of this volume is a welcome event as it tries to establish, very persuasively, the significance of the concerns it raises to comprehend the world we live in, as well as the relevance of Marxian political economy. Those interested in analysing the economy and society in the Third World countries cannot afford to ignore Bagchi's contributions on these grounds, no matter what one thinks of the precise formulations or fine-comb details of his arguments.

The essays in the volume are grouped under three parts: (a) History and Nature of the Indian Bourgeoisie, (b) Labour in the Toils of Colonial and Global Capital, and (c) Multiculturalism, Communalism and the Bourgeoisie. These essays are prefaced by a substantive introduction by the author, titled Capital and Labour at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century, that provides connecting threads to situate the volume.

Part I of the book gives a flavour of the themes that got the author much acclaim right

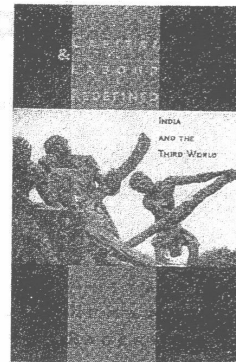
at the beginning of his academic career, namely, a whole range of issues relating to the Indian capitalist class. There are four essays here: (a) The Economics of Business and the Business of Economics, (b) Merchants and Colonialism, (c) Reflections on the Nature of the Indian Bourgeoisie, and (d) Colonialism and the Nature of 'Capitalist' Enterprise in India. Taken together, these essays provide a brief account of the genesis, evolution and the nature of the Indian capitalist class from before the advent of the British colonial rule in India. As these essays were originally written at different times, and for different purposes (e.g. a couple of these are texts of memorial lectures), but covering closely related issues, there are some unavoidable overlaps in terms of ideas; nonetheless, the way the arguments are constructed, drawing upon the richness of empirical details, each piece has its own distinct and confident identity. The crux of the author's position is that what we have in India, (like many other developing countries), is a 'malformed capitalism carrying the diseases of feudal, colonial and tribal social relations and power-structures within its body-politic' (p. x); clearly, the central actor in this 'malformed' system, i.e. the Indian capitalist class, is a deformed entity in the sense of embodying the said diseases. One may state the author's severe indictment of this class in his own words: 'Big Indian capitalists by and large remain casteist, communalist, collaborationist, authoritarian, and thrive by corruptly utilizing governmental machinery. They behave like short-sighted merchants even when they control large factories. The few who try to behave as industrial capitalists and exploit the home market for increasing output and productivity gains, are all the time hobbled by myopic governmental policies favouring collaboration with foreign capital on unequal terms' (p. 89). Strong words indeed. And in some ways may be far too sweeping: for instance, the government policies of the Nehru-Mahalanobis era *vis-à-vis* foreign capital can hardly be painted with the same brush as the policies in the recent neoliberal era. Nonetheless, whatever be one's response to the author's trenchant and provocative critique of the Indian capitalist class, it has to be said that it is backed by his characteristic formidable scholarship. He makes a persuasive case that the nature of the capitalist class in India is in itself an impediment to the quickening of the growth

of capitalism.

The second part of the book has five essays: (a) *The Ambiguity of Progress: Indian Society in Transition*, (b) *Wealth and Work in Calcutta: 1860-1921*, (c) *Working-class consciousness*, (d) *Dualism and Dialectics in the Historiography of Labour*, and (e) *Neoliberal Economic Reforms and Workers of the Third World: At the End of the Second Millennium of the Christian Era*. As should be evident from the titles of these essays, we have an impressive spectrum here, the richness of which unfolds as one reads through them. The connecting link between these essays is the dialectical interaction between capital and labour through a myriad structures and processes, globally as well locally, with a focus on the conditions of the working class in India. On the whole, we have a most perceptive journey through a terrain covering many areas of workers' lives—material, social, political, cultural and complex interactions between them—taking us through the details of the wretched hovels of labouring women and men in colonial Calcutta to the relatively rarified grand questions relating to conceptual constructions such as 'working class consciousness' and the like. Several important issues are addressed in these essays by the author but obviously this is not the place to summarize them. From his accounts, the readers are reminded, time and again, with much force, the miserable plight and struggles against formidable odds of the overwhelming proportion of Indian workers. Unlike in the case of

advanced capitalist countries, where a combination of factors, including heavy out migration as well as wide-ranging affirmative state action have played key roles in sustained and very substantial improvements in the standards of living of workers, there has been little progress in this regard in most developing countries. Even though a whole range of social and economic rights are enshrined in India's constitution, in practice workers do not have even security from starvation, not to speak of the right to a decent subsistence. There are no social security measures or public provisioning of basic needs worth the name. Moreover, as the author argues, during the recent years of neoliberal economic reforms, which is allowing the licentiousness of capital to run amok, such deprivations have tended to become more glaring.

Part III of the book has two essays: (a) *Predatory commercialization and Communalism in India*, and (b) *Multiculturalism, Governance and the Indian Bourgeoisie*. These contributions investigate important themes such as the connections between material progress, access to/denial of decent economic opportunities and their relations to certain brands of nationalism. In a pointed manner, these essays also explore the prospects of the multicultural democracy with equality of rights for everybody and its relationship with the nature of the contemporary Indian bourgeoisie. Essentially, the author's analysis tells us that a variety of retrograde economic processes are responsible for the consolidation of the socially



conservative nationalism in India, and there are grave dangers in not addressing these issues in a frontal manner.

In sum, here is a collection of essays with an enormous sweep, backed by immense scholarship, which attempts to grapple with some of the most important aspects of the Indian economy and society. Also, in terms of the wealth of insights, sometimes tucked away in the footnotes, and the number of issues it throws up for discussion and research, this is an impressive work. ■

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In Pursuit of Profit

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan

MONEY AND CREDIT IN INDIAN HISTORY
Edited by Amiya Kumar Bagchi
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 228, Rs 450.00

There is a tendency amongst modern economists to assume that the topics that they study are somehow unique in both space and time. This tendency has intensified ever since the modern boom began in what now goes under the general rubric of the 'financial sector'. Starting around 1985, the boom has ensured a rapid growth in not just the demand for, but also in the supply of, economists specializing in the financial sector.

What until then used to be arcane areas of study reserved for the eccentric few have now become the fashionable 'thing' to do. In consequence, an oversupply of financial thought has resulted so that much of what these 'financial' economists write is of very little value. Riven by jargon and afflicted by a passion for talking down, these financial sector economists have assumed that they are making discoveries for the first time. But as Aristotle told a pupil as far back as 3,000 years ago, there is nothing new under the sun. Greed and a quest for quick and large profits remains the prime motive driving this sector. The methods for achieving these objectives, however, have remained much the same.

This tight little book, comprising a set of essays by some very well known historians, shows how and why. These essays were originally papers presented at a conference organized by the Indian History Congress in 2000 to fill what the historians felt was a gap in Indian economic history. They throw invaluable light on how money used to grease the wheels of commerce in the old days. In doing so, they tell us how little things have changed in the financial sector, except perhaps for volumes of financial flows. Shireen Moosvi who was the secretary of the IHC at the time, is needlessly apologetic in the preface when she says "a comprehensive coverage is not claimed for the volume". What is there is very enlightening as well.

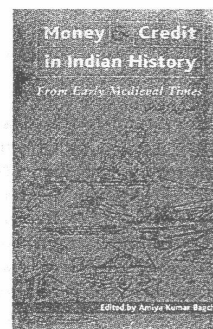
The essays deal with money and feudalism, the systems of credit in Mughal India, the monetary basis of credit and banking instruments, interest rates in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, money and banking under the Marathas, the rise of modern banking in the Princely states, a critique of British Monetary and financial policy in India and rural credit under the Fazlul Huq ministry in Bengal.

What emerges is that the differences between then and now are not all that many or great. Few people realize this. All the macroeconomic fundamentals such as public debt, industrial production, agriculture's vulnerability to the monsoon cycle point to this. But it is not the general similarities alone that hold one's attention. There were similarities in the particular, too. This is evident in paper after paper in this collection. Perhaps the most important of these is the case of interest rates, as discussed by Shireen Moosvi. She has drawn attention to the movements of interest rates in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

It was a period of falling interest rates. The result, says Ms Moosvi, was that interest rates formed four distinct zones, namely, Gujarat, Agra, Bengal and the Deccan. All four rates showed declines, although the magnitudes varied. Why were interest rates falling? The obvious answer, of course, is that the supply of money was increasing faster than the demand for it. Interest rates in Europe too had declined and European managers perceived better returns here. There was therefore an inflow of silver from Europe to India. Mostly, the flow was what is now broadly called the Middle East.

Such large inflows of silver ought to have depreciated its value but, just as the dollar is holding more-or-less steady now, then too the value of silver did not fall in the same proportion as the inflow of silver. The reason: it went towards replacing copper currency and was absorbed by the increasing monetization of the economy. There was a demand then, too, that the silver be, as it were, devalued. In fact, this had been done in 1610. After that, however, the depreciation was not consistent with the rate of inflow of silver. Nor was there much silver hoarding, the equivalent one might say of holding dollars abroad. English company records show that the silver was used up in the mints, that is, it was in productive use.

Ms. Moosvi also discusses the question of the regional differences in interest rates. The difference between the South and the North is often ascribed to the fact that the main currency metal in the South was gold whereas in the North it was silver. But, says Ms Moosvi, this needs further study. Most probably, she says, the South was less developed financially. But there isn't much evidence for this either.



The high rates in Bengal and Orissa were probably due to the equivalent of the PSBR for the nobles there. They had to send money North to the Emperor and were often strapped for cash. Little seems to have changed since then. Bengal and Orissa are still broke and in worse debt than the others. Add to this the huge increase in silk exports from Bengal which increased the demand for credit and we probably have a fairly credible explanation for the higher interest rates.

There are three other essays that this reviewer, at least, found most informative. Rajat Kanta Ray describes indigenous banking and commission agency in the colonial period. Om Prakash, as ever lucid and precise, discusses the systems of credit in Mughal India and Aditya Mukherjee deals with the Indian view of the British monetary and financial policy during the Depression years. Each of these essays helps us understand how the basic elements of the financial sector — the way it works and things that cause conflicts within it — have remained pretty much unchanged except in the matter of technology which has speeded things up. ■

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan is consulting editor, *Business Standard*, New Delhi.

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The Kashmir Imbroglia

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta

KASHMIR: ETHNIC CONFLICT, INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE

By Iffat Malik
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2002, pp. 392, Rs. 450.00

JIHADIS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR: A PORTRAIT GALLERY

By K. Santhanam, Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena, Manish
Sage Publications and IDSA, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 282, Rs. 380.00

DANGER IN KASHMIR

By Josef Korbel
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2002, pp. 351, Rs. 595.00

KASHMIR: BEHIND THE VALE

By M.J. Akbar
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp.223, Rs. 295.00

The Kashmir imbroglia sustains a flourishing South Asian cottage industry producing polemical books and pamphlets. In India, the scene is partly redeemed by a limited number of scholarly works and also some insightful accounts by political activists. Sisir Gupta's classic *Kashmir: A Study in Indo-Pakistan Relations*, Navnita Chadha Behera's recent *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh* and the works of Prem Nath Bazaz and Balraj Puri are examples that immediately spring to mind. The Pakistani contribution to serious scholarship on Kashmir is best described as spartan. Very little academic work has been done, for instance, on the areas of the state under Pakistani control—the so-called "Azad Kashmir" and the "Northern Areas".

Against this backdrop, the appearance of Iffat Malik's *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict, International Dispute* is particularly welcome. A Pakistani scholar born and educated in England, Malik is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad. Her book, perhaps the first serious academic study of Kashmir affairs by a Pakistani author, is based on an extensive study of published sources, supplemented by a large number of interviews with Pakistanis involved with Kashmir developments as well as some British archival material dealing with the historical background.

What are the origins of the ethnic conflict in Kashmir? In Malik's view, "*Kashmiriyat* was more myth than fact". Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits did indeed share a strong sense of regional identity and a distinct regional culture but this was coupled with a strong sense of religious identity in the case of both communities. According to her, "Kashmiri society would thus best be described as a plural society in which relations between the two main ethnic groups...were good to the extent of functional and economic interactions but did not extend to social interaction". Moreover, compared to the situation in 1947, "among both ethnic

groups perceptions of identity are now much more firmly rooted in religion."

In the case of Kashmiri Muslims, ethnic identity and consciousness have become more pronounced with political mobilization, in a situation where the state and central governments have failed to meet aspirations for democracy, autonomy and socio-economic development. Frustration on this account have led to disenchantment with India and have caused the community to emphasize the characteristics that distinguished them from other Indians, namely their Kashmiri and Islamic identities. The latter was also influenced by other developments. Malik maintains that there was a perception on the part of Kashmiri Muslims that the Indian government's educational and cultural policies were designed to reduce the role of Islam in the Valley. After examining the facts, she concludes that the "evidence to support a concerted Indian policy of secularization/Hinduization is highly debatable"; nevertheless, it was a fact that "many Kashmiri Muslims believed such a policy was being carried out". Another internal factor that had the effect of strengthening the Islamic identity of the community was the rise of political Hinduism as represented by the BJP. "In 1947, secularism had been lauded as the bedrock of a united multi-religious state," Malik writes. "As it weakened and nationalist Hindu rhetoric gained a wider following, it became harder for Kashmiri Muslims to feel they belonged to India."

Malik acknowledges that, in 1947, the majority of Kashmiri Muslims preferred accession to India, though Muslims outside the Valley generally preferred Pakistan. According to her, however, the "main political division between Kashmiri Muslims now is between those wishing to accede to Pakistan and those wanting an independent Kashmir." She believes that the pro-Pakistan group was almost certainly in a majority when the armed insurrection broke out after the 1987 elections but that, "as the conflict drags on it is the ranks

of pro-independence Kashmiris that are being swollen." These are, of course, highly questionable assessments but it must be noted that they are not offered in a polemical spirit.

Malik briefly examines the dismal political record of the areas of Jammu & Kashmir under Pakistani control and comes to the conclusion that Pakistan's "treatment of Azad Kashmir has not differed greatly from India's treatment of its Kashmir ... Indian Kashmiris would have little to gain from exchanging New Delhi's control for Islamabad's." How does she square this with her assertion that a large section of Kashmiri Muslims would opt for Pakistan (even though they may no longer be in a majority)? Malik observes that "Valley Muslims are not fully aware of what is going on in Pakistan...most Kashmiri Muslims have a somewhat rose-tinted picture of Pakistan — their perceptions of it correlate more with the ideal of what it was meant to be, than with the reality of what it actually is." A further reason, according to her, is that after the human rights violations accompanying the security clamp-down, many Kashmiris see "Azad Kashmir" and Pakistan as places where Muslims can live more safely.

What, then, are the prospects for the future? Malik maintains that there is a lack of real resolve on the part of both Indian and Pakistani leaders to settle the Kashmir question. In the case of Pakistan, domestic compulsions—most notably the institutional interests of an Army which needs to project India as an enemy in order to justify a massive defence budget—force Islamabad to adopt a hard-line stance on Kashmir. A diplomatic solution is nowhere on the horizon. The Kashmir conflict "has now effectively reached a stalemate", she concludes. International pressure will make it very difficult for either side to change the territorial status quo. Kashmiri militants lack sufficient strength to forcibly oust India from the state. India might be able to crush the insurgency but "what happens next will depend on New Delhi. It could use the opportunity...to once again engage the Kashmiri Muslims and try to win them over to India, e.g. by providing genuine autonomy, economic investment, etc. In such a scenario, it is likely that the Kashmiri Muslims would accept their inclusion in the Indian Union as unavoidable and come to terms with it. But New Delhi could also use the absence of armed opposition to continue with the policies that led to conflict in the first place. If this is the case, it would only be a matter of time before Kashmiri Muslim frustration and anger again boiled over into militancy."

A weak point in Malik's otherwise forthright book is a tendency to understate the extent of the ISI's role in promoting terrorism in Kashmir. In particular, she seems to accept at face value Musharraf's "assurances" to the US after 9/11. Santhanam and his IDSA colleagues have rendered a signal service to Indian and foreign readers by producing up-to-date

accounts of the principal terrorist groups operating in Jammu & Kashmir. *Jihadis in Jammu and Kashmir: A Portrait Gallery* is based largely on information collected through the internet, using some in-house software tools. The authors have thus broken new ground in Indian defence studies in respect of research tools. "We look at this book as the first web-enabled product from the IDSA", the authors claim with justifiable pride. The terrorist "portrait gallery" is preceded by a brief historical account of post-1989 developments and comments on the current situation. This very useful compilation deserves to be regularly updated.

The publishers have recently brought out reprints or new editions of two best-sellers—Josef Korbel's *Danger in Kashmir* and M.J. Akbar's *Kashmir—Behind the Vale*. Josef Korbel was a Czech diplomat who served as a member of the UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) in 1948. By the end of the year, the Soviet Union seized effective control of Czechoslovakia and Korbel settled down in America, where he went on to become a university professor and achieve distinction as the father of the future Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. In 1954, Korbel published his account of the Kashmir issue. *Danger in Kashmir* was an uninspired Cold War product. The "danger" of which the title warns is that of a Communist take-over! "Kashmir is being subjected to a systematic process of communization", Korbel claimed, pointing to the "infiltration" into high offices of "Communist members or fellow travelers" such as G.M. Sadiq and D.P. Dhar. One chapter alone redeems this otherwise forgettable book. This is his account of the work of UN Commission for India and Pakistan—the only first-hand account published by a member of UN Commission for India and Pakistan. These pages of the book have been extensively cited in the literature on contemporary Kashmir and they alone justify OUP's decision to bring out another edition of a book first published almost fifty years ago.

Akbar's *Kashmir: Behind the Vale* enjoyed a well-deserved success when it first appeared in 1991. It is a highly readable survey of Kashmiri history, focusing particularly on the developments leading up to the outbreak of militancy in 1990. The present edition deliberately refrains from attempting to update the book. It does not, therefore, deal with the many significant developments that have occurred in Kashmir during the past decade, changes that have been covered by more recent books. Akbar's book reminds one of a Beaujolais, a delightful light wine that is best drunk young. It does not age well. ■

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta, a retired ambassador, is the author of *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947-48*.

Alternate Notions of Security

Anuradha M. Cheney

HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by P.R. Chari and Sonika Gupta
Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 202, Rs.525.00

SOCIETY, STATE AND SECURITY: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE
By Verghese Koithara
Sage, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 424, Rs.580.00

The war in Iraq establishes how important it is to develop an alternate notion of security as opposed to a militarist one propagated by the USA. The naked aggression against Iraq and the designed political chaos that has followed, reminiscent of traditional imperial power displayed by the US-UK regimes will however, inspire most security analysts to support doctrines of realism, increase defence spending and argue for deterrence. This would mean a simplification of international relations to suit the aims of US national security doctrines. This then, is the time to make arguments in support of the concept of human security and show its strengths and relevance. Both the books under review examine this concept in the light of the security discourse.

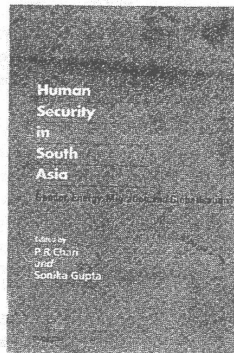
Chari and Gupta have done a fine job of bringing together articles on human security in South Asia. These are articles written primarily by Bangladeshi and Indian scholars, but keeping South Asian concerns in focus. The article by Abdus Sabur which examines the theoretical perspective on human security struck me particularly. Sabur locates the human security debate as part of critiques of realist theory that with modifications dominates international relations theory. He shows how the traditional security approach has really failed to fulfill the security aspirations of people because of the increasing aspirations of state power. Sabur then locates the history of the human security discourse from its origins in the UNDP reports and the work of Mahbub ul Haq and others. Sabur presents his arguments on human security issues and possible responses with the help of tables, a method popularized by the human development reports and their index methods. Though he does not allot value to these categories, he does cover a wide range of security issues that concern people and should concern states much more than they actually do.

An interesting aspect of his tables is that with this he attempts to bring back the role of the state. So the state along with international agencies, civil society actors and others is shown as the concerned actor. This is important, especially because many analysts like Sonika Gupta in her article, besides others,

tend to club analysts who oppose realism or support 'peoples approach' or 'pro-civil society' as anti-government (Gupta, p.54). Clearly, the civil society approach is one that seeks to influence and change government policy to be more people friendly rather than just take a so-called anti-government stance. The one aspect that Sabur could be faulted on to some extent is that his approach does not consider the feminist critiques of realism that have questioned and deconstructed realist theory, providing a base for alternate theories. Sabur applies his theory to South Asia well to show how militarization in the region is connected to human deprivation. Sabur's article is in contrast to that of I.P. Khosla's article on a similar theme, because Khosla, while tracing the history of the human security paradigm, tends ultimately to conflate human security with the traditional realist methodology, a style that is typical of those who have long practised traditional methods of diplomacy.

Another exceptional article in this collection is that by Shaheen Afroz because it combines a clear theoretical perspective with competent research and analysis. She rightly shows the gender-biased approach in development theory and how and why women's work continues to remain indistinguishable. She emphasizes this by showing how in Bangladesh, like in the rest of South Asia, cultural and traditional attitudes continue to ascribe certain roles to men and the more subservient ones to women. Women's work, no matter how much it contributes to the economy, is defined as non-economic. This issue has been debated with much rigour by feminist economists who have given value to domestic labour, but since state and international institutions do not give it economic value, the problem not only continues but also has further marginalized and excluded women. Afroz rightly points out the inherent male bias in data collection and census surveys that do not include the right questions put to women; thus the invisibility of women from the production process continues.

Sonika Gupta, on the other hand, needs to brush up on theory if she wants to address it. Her article is filled with theoretical flaws and gaps. Gender for instance is not a homogenous



concept but a construct that assigns masculine and feminine roles in society. Further, gender theory is not homogenous but consists of different debates and understandings of these roles and methodologies. Her understanding of realism, human security, feminist theory, capitalist and communist models, are all simplified. She would have gained, even if she had read the other articles in this book carefully.

The other articles in the volume on Indian and Bangladesh energy security are competent, as is Chowdhury Abrar on migrant workers. Of course, in this article too as Afroze would have noted, female domestic labour merits just one sentence and is not reflected in the statistics or in the strategies/policies worked out to relate migration with human security.

Mahendra Lama's article 'Poverty, Migration and Conflict' is carefully researched and very well analysed. He has used any number of reports to draw out his data, to show the linkages between poverty, migration and conflict. Lama effectively shows that migrants are gainfully absorbed within the system because of their unique traits and that they actually contribute greatly to the system to which they migrate. This indeed is an important fact that our political and academic elite should accept. At times, where the migration issue is constantly being raised in India to create tensions between people and is a major communal issue, this essay is an outstanding contribution. Perhaps I would have been happier, if Lama had addressed this issue as used by communal politics more directly, but Lama cannot be faulted for treating the subject with caution and competence.

The essays on globalization and human security are well written. Of particular value is the one by Suranjan Das, who after giving a working definition of neo-liberal globalization provides us with much data on the growth of Trans National Corporations, to show up the globalization myth. He then does a non-polemical critique of the Indian liberalization programme, and does so by giving several specific examples from industry. He shows that the structural adjustment programmes have led

to the closure of lakhs of industrial units and exposes the flaws in WTO. His conclusion then, is evident. Globalization is not going to help in providing human security.

T.C.A. Srinivasa Raghavan speaks of many things in one breath. Choices, markets, East Asian economies, water markets, confusion and policy making, sustainability, demand and price control, amongst other things. All in a compact 13 pages. Of course, he argues that the needs of the poor must be addressed and alternate methods should be devised and he suggests two such methods, which the economists should perhaps discuss.

In sum, this is an interesting collection, worth reading, acquiring and keeping on the bookshelf. It is well brought out and edited and gives one the flavour of an important issue like human security in its many aspects all in one volume.

Koithara's *Book on Society, State and Security*, has been around for some time. Published in 1999 and already read by many, this is a fairly well argued book on India's security experience. Koithara, like a good soldier, does not deal with theory, but delves straight into the practice of security as he sees it. Koithara sums up the history, politics, economics of India in the first few pages, and then sets the security of the first fifty years of India in that context. He more or less brings together all facts on record together in this volume, and I must say, to his credit, briefly deals with most of the security issues of the times.

Koithara does not shy from facts or confronting the 'nationalist' positions, that many security experts take. For instance, he shows the strategic mistakes made by Nehru by moving Indian troops forward to Chinese posts that were provocative in Ladakh and the Thag-La regions.

Ultimately, Koithara argues that India's security should include economic, energy, social and other forms of security and that would comprise human security. All very well. But Koithara then is not amongst the 'hawks' who privilege military security over anything else. He makes the right noises about decentralization, re-structuring defence and other things, but remains in line with the national security discourse. Koithara ends up supporting the statist discourse by adding better economics and management and stirring. The curry then just has one new flavour, but is by no means an alternate or even new idea. The value of this book is that it is a decent primer for the beginner in security discourse as long as she does not confine herself to just one book, or read it uncritically. ■

Anuradha M. Chenoy is at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Cooperation vs. Confrontation

Suba Chandran

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS: CROSS BORDER RELATIONS
Edited by J.N. Dixit
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 233, Rs. 395.00

"Physical proximity invariably results in interaction. This however, need not necessarily be positive in content. Interaction can be negative and adversarial" observes J.N. Dixit, the general editor of *External Affairs: Cross Border Relations*. What complicates this interaction is the asymmetry between India and its neighbours in every aspect. Dixit rightly points out that India "has to undertake some very special efforts to remedy the threat perception amongst its neighbours."

What steps has India taken to remedy the threat perceptions of its smaller neighbours? Have these steps succeeded? Why have they failed in certain cases and succeeded in others? Given the history of these attempts and their effectiveness, what further strategies can be adopted? Since the authors of individual chapters have represented India in the respective countries, no one could be in a better position to comment on these issues.

The excellent collection of essays outlines, either deliberately or otherwise, the different approaches that the Indian government could adopt vis-à-vis its neighbours. These strategies include cooling off, active involvement and engagement.

The first essay on Pakistan by S.K. Singh, former Foreign Secretary and former High Commissioner of India, advocates a cooling off approach. On Kashmir, Singh writes, "Pakistan needs to be persuaded that its effort to keep this issue at a boiling point would defeat its purpose of negotiating a settlement." An amicable atmosphere needs to be created and is a precondition for any meaningful negotiation for which, "some years need to be given to this issue, to let emotions and passions calm down, and ensure that the two countries do not feel the need to move towards irrationality and friction."

Will 'keep Kashmir on the backburner' approach work? Pakistan would never agree to this as its objective is to keep the issue boiling. In fact, the main objective of Pakistan in initiating the conflict in Kargil was to give a fillip to terrorism inside the valley which was then declining. The best approach would be to engage Pakistan in a sustained and comprehensive dialogue including Kashmir. Analysing the external financial support to Pakistan, Singh himself concludes, "Pakistan's anti-India

adventurism could rise as a result of these inputs from abroad, just in case their economic situation improves" and on the political front, "real law and order authority and political influence in Pakistan are likely to remain in the hands of the military establishment".

If this is the case, what are the options for India? What strategies could India adopt? Will a proactive policy, rhetorically pursued by the present government and defined in many political and military ways—coercive diplomacy, preemptive strikes and limited war—achieve any tangible results for India? Clearly, 'stop cross border terrorism or else we will not negotiate' strategy has not yielded results. Though there is widespread external support for India's stand, the pressure is not adequate enough to work on Pakistan. What could India do given these realities? Singh's essay would have been comprehensive, had these questions been addressed.

The second approach calls for active interference so as to achieve India's security interests. J.N. Dixit's essay on Sri Lanka, easily the best in the collection, gives valuable information on the inputs that finally resulted in India's Lanka policy. It is essential for academics and policy makers to critically analyse the country's policies so that past mistakes are not repeated and in this regard Dixit needs to be congratulated for being forthright and self critical.

"Was Mrs. Gandhi correct in giving political and material support to the Sri Lanka Tamils"? Dixit answers in the negative, but with a caveat: "Sri Lanka should have been allowed to sort out its own problems". However, had "Sri Lanka been several hundred miles away from the coast of India" then India could have adopted the non-interference policy... Sri Lanka was only 18 miles away from Tamil Nadu. Inter-state relations are not governed by logic or morality. They were and remain amoral phenomenon". This argument is dangerous from an Indian perspective, for Pakistan could use the same.

Why did we get involved? For Dixit, in the first half of the crucial 1980s, "Sri Lanka's emerging security, economic and intelligence connections with Pakistan, Israel and the US were perceived by Mrs. Gandhi as a strategic challenge and threat" and India's involvement in Sri Lanka, "was unavoidable". What were those security, economic and intelligence equations which Sri Lanka was involved in? The Jayawardene government signed an agreement with the US on VOA broadcasting facilities and a contract to repair and restore oil facilities in Trincomalee. Indian interpretation of this as providing "potential base for the American strategic presence", no doubt is an overreaction. And how did we react? By aiding the various Tamil militant groups and pitting one against the other!

No doubt, this assistance played a crucial role in the subsequent rise of the LTTE as the 'sole spokesman' and the systematic annihilation of other militant groups and moderate leadership by the former. Though India, during Rajiv Gandhi's period, realized the monster that India had helped and tried to curb its influence in Thimpu and Bangalore talks and subsequently during the IPKF mission, clearly the LTTE, led by Prabhakaran, was beyond that. The gory assassination of Rajiv Gandhi should serve as a lesson for India on how far can it go in involving itself in the internal conflicts of its neighbours.

The third approach calls for engaging the neighbours after a thorough evaluation of past policies, so as to ensure India's security interests. For that, India no doubt needs to get out of its history prison. K.V. Rajan's essay on Nepal explains Indian perceptions of Nepal: "India became free in 1947, but could not free itself from the British mindset... India's security perspective was essentially a hand-me from British India". Deb Mukharji's essay on Bangladesh also points out that "India's attitude towards Bangladesh was unduly influenced by the circumstances of its birth".

It is also time to move ahead and forge new partnerships, if old treaties and agreements are resented by our neighbours. Rajan, on the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which many inside Nepal feel as a contract that had surrendered their sovereignty to India, says, "the treaty has much of its relevance in the security context" and "neither country today fulfills its obligations either in letter or in spirit". His conclusion—"both countries need to think afresh about the future" and "what is certain is that muddling through is no longer an option for India"—is applicable not only in relation to Nepal but to all of India's smaller neighbours.

At times the neighbours might be helpless despite an issue affecting Indian security. Condemning or criticizing the neighbour would only aggravate the situation rather than addressing it. Rajan on the ISI activities in Nepal against India, while cautioning, "the dangers to India's security will probably remain, even if Pakistan dismantles bases within its borders and inside POK", rightly advises, "whipping Nepal for being a base for ISI activities is severely counterproductive". Salman Haider also points out that Bhutan is a "reluctant host" to the ULFA and Bodo groups and it "would be glad to get rid of them" as "there is considerable public resentment against their illicit occupation of Bhutanese territory". These issues can be better addressed by engaging Nepal and Bhutan rather than by confronting or criticizing them.

Smaller neighbours apart, it would be better if India pursued a cooperative approach even with China. C.V. Ranganathan argues "political leaders of countries, their advisers and opinion

makers need to bring fresh perspectives in existing problems such as the boundary dispute. Simultaneously, they should boldly fashion a broader agenda for constructive cooperation".

India's security in the region thus can only be addressed through positive engagement with its neighbours. This is the distilled wisdom of a host of former Indian diplomats which makes External Affairs: Cross-border Relations a valuable compendium for both students of international affairs and policy-makers. ■

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Multiple Identity on Fluid Terrain

Gopal Guru

BEYOND HINDU AND MUSLIM: MULTIPLE IDENTITY IN NARRATIVES FROM VILLAGE INDIA

By Peter Gottschalk

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 215, Rs 525.00

In the social science scholarship in India, the disciplines like anthropology and sociology have focused on the village studies particularly during the decades after Independence. Obviously, the aim of the studies was to explore the sociological dimension of Indian villages. These studies were being conducted in the context of the modernity paradigm which was haunting some of the scholars. Thus, caste and community became the core categories of analysis of these studies while Marxist studies resurrected class as the central single category. But during the last few years the focus of studies on Indian villages is shifting fast from caste to communalism. This shift in the categories can be understood basically in terms of the communal divide that has threatened the synergetic tradition upheld for several hundred years in the country. The communal tension that confined to the urban centers has now reached rural India. This development has rendered the composite culture representing the Bhakti and Sufi traditions almost ineffective. In a way the collective memory of the composite and synergetic tradition is facing erosion.

In the context of these developments, the book under review raises very important issues regarding the dynamic of multiple identities and collective memories. The site for the studies is from the cluster of villages centering around Arampur in Bihar. The book seeks to explore the broad social context of identity formation and its articulation within the narrow area of a single group of villages. But the author has not remained confined to this village and made intellectually sophisticated efforts to take the village around the world in terms of intellectual theoretical engagements. This study therefore is different from the conservative discipline of anthropology which hardly opens any intellectual corridors outside the village. The study of the village operates in the background of the issues related to cricket with Pakistan and the nuclear bomb made by both India and Pakistan. What bearing does it have on the social relationship in the village?

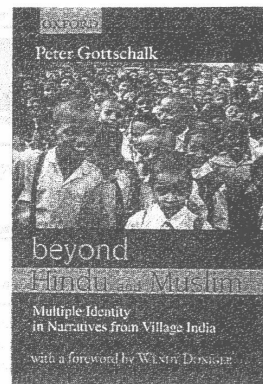
The author makes a brilliant attempt to assign a universal conceptual theoretical context to this village by drawing on several contemporary scholars prominent among being Paul Ricoure. One of the important points that the book makes is about the erosion and creation of collective memories across the

religious groups in the village. He argues that in this village Hindus and Muslims shared certain identities. But this is marred by the simmering collective suspicion. This tension is visible in the Muslim act of showing patriotism by putting the Indian flag on their money box or the wall and so on and so forth.

However, the question that is not dealt with in the book is, why do the Muslims have to demonstrate their commitment to the nation? Who has the moral stamina to put the Muslim on probation? Do the Hindus have that moral right to do so? The book under review does not seem to offer enough explanation about this point which is so crucial. However, the author has made a successful attempt to portray the group memories and narratives that may have cross currents within themselves but (Lakshmi Devi and Mujun Khan intersecting narratives) are propelled by shared social interests. This rightly provides the evidence that the *yad* (memory) of some individuals from the villages under reference may form part of the collective memory.

The question that needs to be further probed is why certain people choose to remember and forget. Is the act of forgetting deliberate? The narratives that are portrayed have claimed to be competitive involving four from the village. Yet the author argues that the villages under study share a common public sphere in their villages. The Shatri Brahma temple and the Asta Auliya Darga provide a scope for this kind of integration. These spiritual centers are treated as the healing centers and hence lead to the forging of common identity of the people otherwise coming from different religious backgrounds. The author also records how the formal educational system can provide a single national identity. This observation of the author is based on the experience of the Amarpur school experience.

It can be argued here that the strength of the book lies in its capacity to abstract village reality and successfully integrate it into the broader theoretical framework drawing on it a number of influential theorists in contemporary times. However, the author does not give us information about what happened to this cluster of villages after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. To what extent did the fluidity of identity in the village help in maintaining the peace in the village? Have they got lost in the ocean of their memories (to use the term of



the authors)?

These questions become obvious when the village people are moving from one identity to another often in a regressive way. Another lapse in the study is that the dominant patterns of social relationship in the Indian villages is built up around the caste system. This is true even of Christianity and Islam. From the study it is not clear why the caste system has shaped the social relationship in the village; secondly, if the caste system has gone into the background and has been overtaken by communal considerations, it is necessary to explain how this shift has taken place even in terms of the villages studied by the author. ■

Gopal Guru teaches in the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, Delhi.

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Essence of a Fine and Sensitive Mind

Rudrangshu Mukherjee

THE ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (2 Volumes)

Edited by S. Gopal and Uma Iyengar

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003, pp. 1200, Set Price Rs. 2450.00

These are not easy volumes to review because two very attractive personalities have come together here. Jawaharlal Nehru, and his biographer, S. Gopal. One could put it in another way, hero and admirer since Gopal never made bones about the fact that Nehru was the hero of his youth and even in his middle age when he began work on the three volume biography, the image of Nehru glowed for Gopal. There were many apparent similarities between the subject and the biographer. Both had a certain fondness for the English way of life which often made them appear out of place in India, Gopal more so than Nehru. Both oozed charm which made them almost irresistible. An intrinsic part of their charm was their wonderful sense of humour. Their zest for life, and the good things of life, was evident in all that they did.

The dissimilarities were, however, considerable. Nehru was essentially a man of politics, at home among the masses and in the salon. Gopal was a man of scholarship, he was at his best among people he loved or liked. In a wider circle, he was invariably withdrawn even at times slightly arrogant. Nehru's reading, because of the constraints under which he read—in jail or after keeping long office hours—always had the hint of shallowness. Gopal's was wide as well as deep. Both wrote wonderful prose but Gopal's was more exact while Nehru's could at times border on the prolix and the purple. Above all, there was the obvious difference of stature. Nehru had the world as his stage and enjoyed this. Gopal was always laid back and on most occasions backed into the limelight.

Apart from writing Nehru's biography, Gopal was also the editor of *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. The two volumes under review are actually a spin-off from that project which runs into many volumes. Nehru, like Gandhi, was a prolific writer. Apart from his books he wrote letters, memos, speeches and so on. It must have been an almost superhuman task to sift through this material and to arrive at what is essential to the understanding of Nehru, his work and his mind.

There is no need to rehearse here Nehru's antecedents. Mountbatten once declared "Harrow and Trinity. He was one of us." Nehru himself admitted in his Autobiography that when he arrived back in India after Harrow, Cambridge and as a qualified barrister from the Inner Temple he was a "bit of a prig with little to commend me." All this was utterly transformed after his encounter with Gandhi.

This is how he recalled it unforgettably in *The Discovery of India*: "And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths; like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India (sic), speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition." The passage exemplifies the best and the worst in Nehru's prose. It is stirring and evocative but it is prolix with metaphors falling over similes. Thus Gandhi is a current, a beam of light, a whirlwind.

Despite his Anglophone education Nehru identified completely with India and her people. This was most eloquently expressed in his will and testament which he drafted in midsummer 1954: "I have received so much love and affection from the Indian people that nothing that I can do can repay even a small fraction of it, and indeed there can be no repayment of so precious a thing as affection.... The major portion of my ashes should, however, be disposed of otherwise. I want these to be carried high up into the air in an aeroplane and scattered from that height over the fields where the peasants of India toil, so that they might mingle with the dust and soil of India and become an indistinguishable part of India."

In *The Discovery of India*, a much more emotional book than *An Autobiography*, Nehru wrote of his interaction with the peasants. "I would ask them," he wrote, "unexpectedly, who was this Bharat Mata... My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me... they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it... I would endeavour to do so and explain... The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this Bharat Mata, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves Bharat Mata, and this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery." Nehru never came back later in his life to reflect upon whether independence had been a victory for the people

of India, especially the poor people of India. In the context of the Partition, the blood-shed that came with independence and the disillusionment that followed, one would have expected a man as introspective as Nehru to ponder over the "we" in that famous speech regarding the trust with destiny. Did Nehru always speak for India and all Indians?

More than the political themes covered adequately in these volumes, the personal writings are more attractive since they reveal a fine and sensitive mind which was rare in Nehru's own time and rarer even now. It is impossible to think of John F. Kennedy or Nikita Khrushchev writing about some of the feelings and emotions that Nehru expressed. Perhaps only Mao Ze Dong and Ho Chi Minh in their rare bursts of poetry touched such realms of sensitivity. Which politician in his routine fortnightly letter to chief ministers would quote and reflect upon Yeats's lines about time and the world being forever in flight. In 1935 to his daughter, he wrote, "There is a terrible lot of vulgarity in the world and we see it everywhere in India. And when I talk of vulgarity I do not refer to the poor; they are singularly free from it for they do not try to pose and appear to be something other than they are. It is our middle class that is often vulgar. It has no artistic standards and it has got rather lost between eastern and western culture. It is hardly to blame for it for circumstances have forced this unhappy state of affairs on it. Political circumstances have largely made us what we are and then there is our narrow domestic life. And so when we go out into the world we are often making false gestures which jar on the sensitive."

Since Nehru's time this vulgarity has increased exponentially. Much of this had become evident in Nehru's own time. Nehru was above all this. His loftiness was often misunderstood but it grew from his quest for the good and the beautiful. Gopal's biography, somewhat deliberately, left out everything that was personal, Nehru's sensibilities, his relationship with his wife, other women and so on. In these volumes there are a few personal musings. It is impossible, of course, to make a distinction between Nehru, the politician, and Nehru, the human being. But the latter is more endearing. It is the strength of these volumes that they succeed in presenting both sides of Nehru's persona.

I would like to end this review with a small point. One of the editors of these volumes is S. Gopal. Yet the volumes are dedicated to him. It is true that these volumes have been published after Gopal's death but I have no manner of doubt that Gopal, from the Valhalla of historians, will frown on the dedication as being improper. The dedication is not only unnecessary but smacks of a particular form of behaviour which both Nehru and Gopal detested. ■

Rudrangshu Mukherjee is the Editor, *The Telegraph*, Kolkata.

Reminiscences of an Unrepentant but Reformed Communist

Sumit Chakravartty

A TRAVELLER AND THE ROAD—THE JOURNEY OF AN INDIAN COMMUNIST
By Mohit Sen
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2003, pp. 524, Rs. 395.00

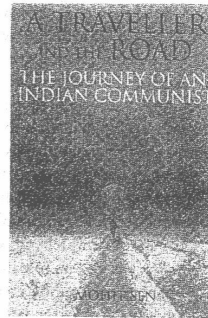
For Mohit Sen, the God did not fail, he remained till his last (so difficult to believe that he is no more!) an unrepentant Communist. And yet he was not an unreformed Marxist. This comes out in bold relief in his autobiography which was released in the capital on March 7 this year. One of the running themes in his memoirs is the struggle against Stalinism—the inability to wage war which on the national and international planes led to such a huge cost—in the form of the massive setback to the socialist cause—worldwide. But he does not stop there. While unequivocally asserting that “it was not Lenin, to say nothing of Marx, that made Stalin possible” (p. 499), he concedes thereafter:

...objective circumstances apart, there were elements in Lenin's theory and practice that enabled Stalin to succeed him and do what he did. Lenin never distinguished clearly between class struggle and class war. For him, the latter was the manifestation of the former... All processes could and had to be pushed to their climax as speedily as possible. Determinism and voluntarism often merged in his thought and action.

Lenin's depiction of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the rule of the working class alone, though requiring the alliance of the poor peasantry, and as being untrammelled by any law or moral imperative for as long as those in power thought necessary, was one-sided and enabled Stalin to justify much of what he did. Stalin was also helped by Lenin's idolisation of discipline in the Party almost equating it with obedience to the leadership and the leader (pp. 499-500).

It is such passages in the last chapter 'Reflections', the best part of the book, that make it eminently readable.

The autobiography of such a reputed Marxist ideologue—one of the most distinguished in the country—would have normally attracted wide attention. But the interest in this regard was enhanced due to the fact that Mohit Sen was no armchair Marxist. Even before he had become a wholetime Party worker in India he had the rare distinction of undergoing a rigorous course in Communist training in China and that included privation for a long period when he had no connection with the wider world leave aside his relatives or the woman he deeply loved and married later (Vanaja Iyengar). Besides, he had the rich experience of getting a glimpse of the remarkable agrarian reforms underway in that country. What he saw was indeed fascinating. As he himself lucidly underlines,



I had the privilege and joy to witness an act of correction that took place after thousands of years of injustice. It was literally 'turning the world upside down'. *Fanshang* was what it was called in Chinese. Those who had been lording over the multitudes were suppressed. Those who had been deprived, above all, of human dignity were brought onto the road of freedom and equality. The CPC led not only the struggle for national emancipation but also that for social justice (pp. 101-02).

In China Mohit was given a Chinese name—Chou Thu Li. And he with other foreign comrades was taken by train to a village called Hsien Thien Pu where he was able to witness apart from land reforms the radical transformation of society. He saw with his own eyes the act of cruelty perpetrated for centuries on Chinese womenfolk—the feet of young girls tightly bandaged so that they never grew while the rest of the body did: their feet were maimed forever. And he also saw how Communists and other progressive forces, led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen's wife Soong Ching-ling, initiated the movement for emancipation of women from such an inhuman custom. In the same village he found the transformation of one who belonged to the most downtrodden section of society, Lao Chungti—he, who was kowtowing only the other day, now stood upright instructing youngsters how to deal with the landlords who had subjected them to age-old humiliation besides persecution. On seeing the change in Lao Chungti, Mohit was reminded of “Mao's classic statement on the founding of the People's Republic of China...—the Chinese people have stood up” (p. 99). Lao Chungti was a living embodiment of that assertion.

Mohit's memoirs cover the entire period of the united CPI's growth through the adoption of the parliamentary path of struggle following the disastrous Ranadive experiment in sectarian self-destruction when he watched the unfolding events from his vantage position in the CPI headquarters. One wonders why he was not inducted into the peasant movement where his experiences in China would have been an asset. Of course, the task of working among the peasantry would not have been easy especially for a person brought up in a highly westernized Brahmo family. But then so was the case of

Indrajit Gupta, who despite a similar westernized upbringing, consciously decided to work among tramway, jute and port workers of Calcutta and became a top trade union leader of Bengal before being elected to Parliament in 1959. However, work in the kisan front could have deprived Mohit of acquiring the eminence of a Marxist theoretician, although one of the most illustrious theoretical figures the Indian communist movement has produced worked in that front and happened to be one of the key brains behind the launch of the Tebhaga movement in Bengal—Bhowani Sen. Mohit was, of course, initially assigned a different task by P. Sundarayya but subsequently he was inducted into the Party's all-India centre that had by then moved to Delhi.

There is a wealth of information regarding the functioning of the Party that went through the trauma of the electoral debacle in Andhra (1955) and the triumph of the electoral success in Kerala (1957). Several episodes and pen-portraits of personalities make the account highly absorbing. Side by side one is moved by Mohit's humane feelings towards others.

Besides his deep love for Vanaja, what comes out in his prose is his attitude towards people—like Comrade Rashid, the ever-smiling party functionary at the PHQ. And yet, while highlighting Rashid's sterling qualities including his loyalty to the Party he perceptively points out:

Such loyalty is both admirable and stultifying.

In some ways it is at the heart of the strength that enabled Communists to accomplish history-transforming deeds. It is also the reason why the Stalinist leaderships were able to perpetrate the crimes that they committed and get away with them but at the cost of ultimate debacle (p. 135).

P.C. Joshi and S.A. Dange stand out in the book as Mohit's heroes because of their tireless striving to link the Communist movement with the national mainstream. Ajoy Ghosh's endeavours were also directed towards that end even though Mohit, while praising Ajoy's role on several crucial issues (especially those related to the international communist movement) and projecting him as a “very decent person”, does not place him in that category. And he candidly speaks of the impact on his mind made by A.K. Gopalan and Jyoti Basu, the former with his simple, mass-oriented approach and the latter with his laconic humour. Here he presents an objective assessment of individuals even while holding on to the positions he took on the Chinese attack in 1962 and the Party split in 1964—he stayed on in the CPI though he frankly admits in the book that the split did not mark a clear break with Stalinism in the CPI, a complaint that crops up time and again.

An interesting episode in his life was his conversation with Jawaharlal Nehru in 1963 when he asked a searching question on why Nehru did not align with the Left at the Tripuri Congress session (1939). Nehru stood his ground saying: “(Subhas) Bose and many others of the Left failed to appreciate ad-

equately Gandhi's enormous mass influence, as also the tremendous revolutionary role that he was playing" (p. 237). Moreover, Mohit says, "Nehru argued at some length about the failure of the Left, especially the Communists, to properly understand India and to speak in a language that would be understood by the common people" (p. 237). What is significant is that after the meeting Nehru is learnt to have made a note on the points raised by Mohit, adding that "Mohit Sen was a Communist with nationalist sympathies"—something conveyed by S. Gopal to him (p. 239).

The book, it must be admitted, does suffer from subjectivism at times as is natural in any such autobiography. This becomes glaring in the author's evaluation of the Emergency (1975-77). An uncritical supporter of the Emergency Mohit Sen never felt it necessary to revise his opinion on that score even when he was under severe attack at the CPI's Bhatinda Congress (1978) precisely for such a stand. He stood by his beliefs thereby testifying that his support to the Emergency or Indira Gandhi was rooted in ideology, not based on any transient consideration propelled by petty politics and selfish motivation. But what is somewhat inexplicable is his characterization of Sanjay Gandhi in the context of the Emergency. While admitting that "his (Sanjay) instincts and outlook were not democratic and even fascistic", he lauds him as "an ardent nationalist, secularist and a firm believer in action" to add:

He also knew that his mother remaining in power was indispensable for India. His positive role at that crucial moment cannot be underestimated (p. 348).

His subjectivism also acquires a new dimension when it comes to Indira Gandhi—She was not just a great leader. But it is as a great leader—one of the greatest who can be placed at the same level as her father and only below Gandhi—of a great country that she has become immortal (pp. 423-24).

One can only guess why he took such an attitude towards her—perhaps to weed out every trace of sectarianism that has plagued the Communist movement in its approach to the national mainstream represented by the National Congress. No doubt this is of special significance in the present scenario when the forces of majoritarian communalism are on the offensive as never before now that they are wielding the levers of power. And also because anti-Congress sectarianism is the basic malaise afflicting the Communist parties thereby betraying what can be safely described as 'infantile disorder' they have yet to overcome. But the question remains: would such an uncritical and unconditional support to the Congress from the side of the Left actually help the former, or would it not in effect subvert the entire exercise of forging the Left's unity with the nationalist forces?

Be that as it may, it is in the concluding chapter that Mohit Sen, free of the trappings of

Party discipline (he left the CPI some years ago—following a bitter inner-party struggle within that parent organization—to set up the UCPI which he tried to free from the Stalinist shackles), candidly presents a self-critical evaluation of what went wrong in the communist project across the globe. He unhesitatingly exposes the "gaps in Communist theory that led to the setback and crisis in which it finds itself today" (p. 503)—the failure to understand democracy, the inability to appreciate the scientific-technological revolution (STR), the incapacity to comprehend what constitutes the working class and its role in the progress of history to socialism, the incorrect evaluation of nationalism. It is in the last context that he succinctly conveys something that is daringly striking:

In India, as elsewhere, the Communists were patriots and champions of the working people of the country. But they were not nationalists. They did not know India. In my own case, I became a Communist and worked as a Communist for decades before I accepted India. I was not an exception. Mao Dzedong was wrong in wanting to Sinicise Marxism and to bring into being Chinese Communism. The correct effort would have been to be Communist and Chinese. Ho Chi Minh achieved this. So did Joshi and Dange. But they were exceptions. Of course nationalism could turn ugly and did. But so could Communism itself and did (p. 505).

There are some illuminating sidelights in the book—young Mohit enquiring from Rajaji why he had opposed the Quit India movement and the latter patiently explaining how his opposition to the 1942 struggle differed from that of the Communists; Communist leader Somnath Lahiri's exposition in Bengali of the works of Shelly and the romantic poets before a crowd of hostile students to mesmerize them and thereafter spell out the political message he wanted to convey; Mohit's interactions with such personalities as E.M. Forster, Maurice Dobb, Eric Hobsbawm in Cambridge; his assessment of Rajani Palme Dutt; how he secured his father's indirect permission to join the Communist Party, something his eldest brother 'Bundle' Pratap Chandra Sen did not get; his father's conversations with Communist leaders including P.C. Joshi at the Raj Bhavan, Bombay, the then headquarters of the Party; his meetings with Vanaja in Cambridge and how they proposed to each other on a visit to Budapest in 1950.

The book suffers from some typos as is only to be expected, but a few genuine errors in terms of timing of events and likewise have also crept in.

Mohit Sen's book release function took place in New Delhi on March 7, 2003, and in Hyderabad the formal launch of the memoirs was held on May 1 with his close friend B.P.R. Vithal dissecting the publication in a brilliant analysis. And on May 3 night he breathed his last (his lifeless body was found the next morning at his Hyderabad residence). It was as

if he was waiting for the release of the book to bid farewell to his numerous friends and admirers who came in such large numbers for both the functions.

This vividly reflected his hold on the national polity also manifest in the wide circle of his friends and comrades mentioned in the memoirs. These narratives make it both lively and interesting, his engaging style of writing adding to the flavour.

With all his subjectivism in certain areas the publication projects his overall objective assessment of the present-day reality without in any way jettisoning his convictions. This comes out in sharp relief in the last three paragraphs of the publication thereby enabling one to capture the essence of the personality and his evolution over the years.

Human fallibility is all too often due more to prejudice and jealousy than to lack of understanding. Extraneous considerations come in the way of doing what you know you should. Brecht has written, as mentioned earlier, 'Unhappy the nation that needs heroes'. I would add 'tragic the movement that cannot have the heroes it needs!' Nevertheless, as Moonis Raza once said as he lay dying of cancer, the traveller need not only blame himself as he stumbles—the tortuous and torturing road also has its share of the blame. We perhaps attempted too much but that is what the times demanded and proclaimed. We would have made more mistakes and achieved less had we not attempted to do the impossible. Out of such folly is loveliness born and the world remade even if by others. We pass on our message of historical impudence. My only regret is not that we were not wiser but that morally we were not better. We had too much of personal ambition and realized too little that to be good one had to know the pain of others—the true Vaishnavite '*peer parayee jaane re*'. It was not difficult to understand but extremely difficult to give priority to. The road stretches temptingly. We shall not be there long enough to know who will travel along it to the end. But some will. Unlike us they will be but not alien to our endeavours and desires. There will be continuity along with the break. Communists we have been of different kinds. There will be other kinds in the future but Communists there will be. More open than we were, less arrogant and going along with many others who will not be Communists but whose aims though differently expressed will not be all that different from and not antagonistic to what Marx wished for humanity. He predicted fulfilment without insisting that a particular party was needed for it. History would do it in its own way. It is enough that we were given the chance to be a part of its greatest forward movement (pp. 509-10).

A more lyrical, introspective and self-critical testament anchored in the past commitment of the youth is difficult to find. And therein lies the humanist philosophy that guided Mohit Sen's life through all its twists and turns. ■

Sumit Chakravarty is the editor of *Mainstream*.

Epistles From A Multilingual Scholar

N.S. Jagannathan

A HUNDRED LETTERS FROM ENGLAND

By William Radice

Indilog Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp 505, Rs. 395.00

Aficionados of the *Statesman* newspaper are familiar with its anglophile propensities long after the sun had set on the British Empire and its ownership got transferred to Indian hands. Even after Independence, it had some fine Englishmen-editors such as Arthur Moore, Ian Stephens and Lindsay Emmerson — the last after an interregnum of Indian editors. All of them kept aloft the great traditions of fierce independence and critical support to Indian aspirations set by its legendary founder, Robert Knight who started it in 1875 (He also founded *The Times of India* in Bombay in 1861).

Though the *Statesman* has had a Delhi edition since the early thirties, it is essentially a Calcutta paper with a reluctant presence in the upstart Capital, when in 1911 Calcutta ceased to be the seat of power—an outrage that no Bengali has ever forgiven. Its Calcutta moorings were particularly evident in its literary pages, where the symbiotic relationship between English and Bengali used to produce some excellent writing characterized by a critical literacy rarely to be found in Indian newspapers. These pages were avidly read by the dhoti-clad, anglophile *bhadralok* of Bengal, who combined a fierce nationalism with a profound love of the English language and its literature. These loyal readers of the *Statesman* shared—though they may not avow it in public—Nirad Chaudhury's provocative dedication of his autobiography in which he defiantly declared that he owed all that was best in him to the British Empire.

For its part, the *Statesman* kept alive its Englishness in several ways. 'The Times Crossword', a daily torment, eagerly endured to this day, had many addicts, though over the years it has itself changed. The regular reproduction of articles from the same newspaper was another link with the adopted mother country. But the best loved of such nostalgic connections was the weekly "London Notebook" filed by successive *Statesman* hands in retirement (exile?), such as James Cowley. These pieces written with brilliant journalistic panache and brimming with wit and humour, was a Sunday indulgence which long-living readers of *Statesman* will recall with delight.

William Radice had thus a formidable tradition to contend with when he accepted the *Statesman's* invitation in 1998 to write a weekly letter from England with the purpose, as he puts it, "of opening every fortnight a window on an unexpected aspect of British life." Radice's own credentials to write such letters are formidable but they are not journalistic, as were Cowley's. He is a poet, translator, among others from Bengali and German, a lecturer in Bengali at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London, an authority on Rabindranath and an indefatigable seminarist across continents. This background determines the nature of these letters. Chatty but serious, informative without any striving after journalistic or literary effect, its unstated target audience is, unlike Cowley's, the more self-consciously literary elite of Bengal.

Radice has wisely chosen a format very different from Chowley's: it is not a 'notebook' miscellany of several items strung together providing an easy read but "a letter" of a scholar, who takes time off from his more serious preoccupations to write a gossipy letter to a serious minded friend about happenings, largely literary, around him. The range of subjects dealt with is mind-boggling: English and Bengali literature, theatre, cinema, music (with doubly arcane byways in it such as "Indeterminacy in Rabindra Sangeet") and many other subjects too numerous to mention. But on all these, Radice has robust and sane things to say. These letters are also enlivened by a number of interactive devices that Radice had dreamed up: among them are competitions for the reader. A "Limerick Competition" (23 September, 1999) and another, (3 October, 2002) a translation contest: readers were asked to do a Bengali or English rendering of, of

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all things, a poem by Apollinaire on rain (*Il pleuvait*) into English or Bengali! Could anything be higher brow than this? The interesting thing was that there were contestants! An unintended interest was added to this contest by an error in Radice's transcription of the poem!

Though nominally from England, these letters of an exceptionally peripatetic scholar with an astonishing range of interests deal with literary and other events in a hundred different locations: among them are Sarajevo (for a production of Tagore's *Post Office* in the local language), Prague (where Radice attends an European conference on South Asian Studies, and, of course, Dacca and Calcutta. Though originally avowed as apolitical, politics keep intruding more than somewhat in these pages: There are some excellent pieces of analysis by a non-professional political commentator, who, however, has taken the trouble to do his homework by boning up on the subject before writing. The piece on Saddam (7 April 2000,) and another on Bosnia (19 July 2002) are two instances among many more. Another letter (8 March, 2000) deals with a libel trial over book that attacked one David Irving who had apparently tried to prove that Hitler's notorious Jewish holocaust was largely a myth.

In all candour, on their first appearance, these letters must have been found heavy going, by the less "bookish" among the *Statesman* readers. If one permits oneself an imaginary analogical situation, these letters would have been more appropriate for the *Times Literary Supplement* than for the daily *Times*. In their present book form, these letters poses a different kind of difficulty—its wide diversity of subject, requiring constant readjustment of one's focus. The best way to savour the delights of this book is to make it a bedside book to be dipped into at random.

Finally, a grouse: For a book containing references to books, journals, events and places—literally in the hundreds, isn't an index elementary courtesy to the reader?

N.S. Jagannathan was formerly the editor of *Indian Express* and the *Indian Review of Books*, Chennai.

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Standing by the Door

Aspi B. Mistry

ABANDON: A ROMANCE

By Pico Iyer

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 354, Rs. 450.00

It's 4 A.M. Nasruddin leaves the tavern and walks the town aimlessly. A policeman stops him. "Why are you walking the streets in the middle of the night?" "Sir," replies Nasruddin, "if I knew the answer to that question, I would have been home hours ago!"

*From The Essential Rumi, Translations
by Coleman Barks*

John Macmillan, the central character of Pico Iyer's latest novel, *Abandon*, has wandered far from home. But like many a traveller who journeys to distant lands in search of strange sights and exotic adventures, he finds himself confronted with his own restlessness and uncertainties. As he works out his obsession with the poetry of Rumi, and tries to unravel the mysteries presented by his new love, a love that has come in a strange uninvited way into his life, the author frames the story of this romance with a plot that takes John to those very strange and exotic places, where Iyer the intrepid travel-writer is at his best. The sights and sounds of Syria and Spain, the streets of Iran, the old houses of India—"the tang" as Iyer describes it elsewhere—provide the atmospheres that give the novel at times, the feel of *film noir*, "thin alleyways trailing off into silence", huddled figures, secret orders, whirling dervishes.

John Macmillan has left England to study in Santa Barbara, where he is struggling to complete his dissertation on Islamic mystical poetry, while trying to see the world through Sufi eyes. The story begins with John in Damascus, where he has come in an attempt to trace a secret manuscript of Sufi poems, which rumours say was smuggled out of Iran at the time of the Islamic Revolution. Being a graduate student of religious studies and Sufism in particular, he is hoping that his discovery would allow him to complete the thesis he is working on, shaking the world of Islamic studies to its roots. Through his academic supervisor he contacts an old reclusive scholar in Damascus, who has nothing to offer him, but recruits him into carrying a gift back to Kristina Jensen in California. He attempts to contact Kristina but instead reaches Camilla her sister. Thus begins the long and sometimes tedious, relationship of John and Camilla.

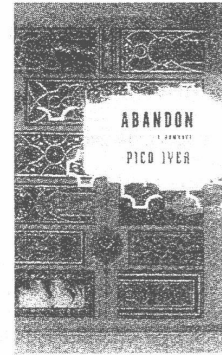
We see Camilla largely through John's eyes,

at times arrogant, at times understanding, often trying to extract a mystical meaning out of her strange and secretive comings and goings. He valiantly tries but fails to immerse himself in his studies and his books, and though he tells her he is "taken" they plunge into a complicated and complex ritual of loving and lovemaking. Before he fled from England and all that it meant for him, he was "taken" by his English girl friend Martine, whose sister Dominique makes a fleeting appearance here. The two English sisters are of course there as a contrast to Kristina and Camilla, the two American sisters. But it is not Martine who should worry Camilla. It slowly becomes clear that if at all John is "taken", it is by Rumi, the thirteenth century poet, who so permeates the novel that he is almost a character in it. Through his poetry, through the mysterious manuscripts, through the lectures at John's seminars, his is perhaps the strongest voice in the book.

The story of Rumi and Shams-I Tabriz, which John recounts to Camilla twice in the novel, once with his own happy ending and once with the truth, is something that John grasps at as a parallel to explain his own relationship with Camilla, hoping (against hope?) that she may be the cause for his transformation, bestowing him with the Sufi eyes he so longs for. The fact is that Shams came into Rumi's life mysteriously; the two became inseparable friends, much to the chagrin and jealousy of Rumi's disciples and relatives. "On the night of December 5, 1248, as Rumi and Shams were talking, Shams was called to the back door. He went out never to be seen again. Most likely he was murdered with the connivance of Rumi's son, Allaedin; if so Shams indeed gave his head for the privilege of mystical Friendship" (Coleman Barks).

It was after Shams' death that Rumi produced his best poetry. It is finally Camilla who presents John with a mysterious manuscript even as she disappears for the time being. The novel ends with John and Camilla making a trip to Iran, but it would not be fair to reveal more than that of the plot here.

As Camilla says at one point, "This reminds me of the stories I used to read when I was a child....About transformation and magic doors and people who went through these hidden doors and came upon a hidden world". The word *dervish* is probably derived from a term



meaning "standing by the door". Has the author prised open that door just a little bit? Or are we all, like John-O and Pico, standing at the doorway, like the nomad's dog, while Rumi's dervish says "I take refuge with God when the dog of arrogance attacks," and the owner has to say, "So do I! I'm helpless against this creature even in my own house! Just as you can't come close, I can't go out!"

Pico Iyer does come close. Very close. He seems to have taken to heart John's supervisor Sefadhi's advice to his prize pupil. "Our mission," the older man had said, in the lightly conspiratorial tone he favoured, "is to smuggle a little of the Sufi light into the smog of California." Pico Iyer's scintillating use of words has opened some of those magic doors, where the reader who is willing to abandon herself may walk through. Nowhere is this more evident than in his use of the word *abandon* to connote so many layers of meaning. "Abandonment is the crime that God is accused of by man....Even Jesus on the Cross raised the same complaint: "O Father, Father, why hast thou abandoned me?". The word "desert" comes from the Latin "deserere", meaning to abandon. "Yet what if we take the word a little differently?What if God gets so lost in the delight, the forgetfulness, of creating, that what He's making somehow takes on a life of its own, as we say? What, in other words, if the abandonment that God is guilty of is not that of desertion but, rather, of rapture, the neglectfulness of the artist who lets the work take over?"

Did Pico Iyer also get lost in the delight of creating John and Camilla, got so forgetful even as he was creating them, that they acquired a life of their own?

In a recent interview with Allison Heilborn on the Random House website, Iyer says about Camilla's character, "My hope is that many readers will begin by recoiling from Camilla—and not understanding why John would see anything in her—and then, as the book goes on, come to be more and more intrigued, and even taken, with her." Unfortunately, it does not seem to work quite that way. How one wishes it had! In fact the reverse may be

happening. The reader is intrigued initially. But as the relationship wears on, Camilla begins to grate and becomes more and more tedious, her eyes welling up with tears at almost anything that John might say.

The novel would indeed have been a much stronger work if the thoughts and ideas of Sufism, the Sufi light, as Sefadhi had advised, had been "smuggled in" through the development of John and Camilla's characters, rather than through a number of other devices. Lectures, seminars, pamphlets, extracts from journals, and finally parts of John's own dissertation are used to explain ideas about Sufism, a legitimate enough device in a novel that has an academic backdrop, but perhaps done once too often.

In the same interview, Iyer speaks of John's character as more of a challenge ... "Many or most readers can't understand why John keeps opening the door to her. And yet opening the door is the key act in this book, and what Sufism, or coming to California mean to me." Yet it is not physical action, but cerebral activity and words, words, words that mark John's life and relationships. They meet children named Cloud and Skye, playing in a half-built (abandoned?) house. He and Camilla talk through the nights, in houses being built in the daytime, *abandoned* at night. One is reminded of what Hafiz, another Sufi poet, said:

*Even angels fear that brand of madness
That arrays itself against the world
And throws sharp stones and spears into
The innocent
And into one's self.*

*O I know the way you can get
If you have not been drinking Love:*

*You might rip apart
Every sentence your friends and teachers say,
Looking for hidden clauses.*

Iyer, aware of this, cautions John and Camilla (and us), speaking through the Sufi teacher: "You do not come to the Sufi way through your mind. The mind is a knife useful only for cutting apart. You do not come to our path through your heart. The heart is a shield for defending yourself against truth. You come to it through grief. Through the shock that breaks you open."

Abandon is a novel with a happy ending. John gets his manuscript. Camilla finally travels to Iran. Standing by the magic door we watch them over the skies of Teheran. As Rumi says, "Wherever there is a ruin, there is a hope for treasure." ■

Aspi B. Mistry is a software consultant and works mainly for NGOs. He is interested in literature, history and Buddhist studies. He is also spokesperson for Friends of Tibet, India.

Tomb in a Million Hearts

Nalini Jain

THE MINIATURIST

By Kunal Basu
Penguin, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 245, Rs. 250.00

Filling in with fiction the gaps left by history, is Kunal Basu's own understanding of the kind of novels he writes. *The Miniaturist*, like Basu's earlier novel, *The Opium Clerk*, may be called a historical novel. History in these novels does not serve merely as backdrop, but winds itself in and around the characters that emerge from it. In his first novel *The Opium Clerk* Basu tells the story of Hiranyagarbha, the young man from Patna, who joins British trade-ventures in the Auction House of Calcutta. He adventures his way through Southeast Asia, from Macao to China, Malaysia and Hong-Kong (the book even provides a map to establish authenticity) along the track-route of the opium trade, gaining only at the end of his life the realization that he was a pawn in a vicious colonial game. His guilt and unhappiness visit him in the form of the half-caste child he had procured for the opium-addicted Mrs Crabbe—she left Douglas behind as both a lingering curse and a companion.

In *The Miniaturist* the central character is the young painter Bihzad. His father, the Khwaja, has groomed him to be the chief artist of Akbar's Kitabkhana, the *shireen qalam* of Fatehpur Sikri. Bihzad was to create the great *Akbarnama*, illuminated illustrations bringing forth the life and conquests of the Emperor. So much, Basu confirms is history. But then as the name of Bihzad fades from the history books, it is revived in Basu's story of Bihzad's love for the emperor Akbar. Bihzad paints the emperor by day in his official version, but he paints Akbar by night in his own *Akbarnama*—in the embraces of his dreams of 'unnatural love'—Akbar gazing fondly at a boy, caressing his young lover, dressed voluptuously as a maid'. Bihzad earns, owing to the theft of his 'secret album', exile from Akbar's vast domain—to the remote desert village of Hazari.

The book focuses on the vexed question of fluid and multiple sexual identities. As a young boy, Bihzad had experienced sexual initiation through his stepmother Zuleikha—"Eyes closed, head tilted to one side, she tempted the bee to sting"—and through the whores in the *Shaitankhana*. Hilal Khan, Akbar's eunuch, becomes Bihzad's chief friend and companion in Hazari. Bihzad marries the King of Hazari's daughter, only to be tormented by her in a three-way relationship. Even when in Bihzad's embrace she, 'would twist her face away from him, and without breaking their union would kiss the eunuch boy'. Zuhra is a free spirit, 'I am a breeze' she said, 'never remain still. I am a desert breeze, never leave my mark, I belong to no one,

no one belongs to me.'

Through the questionings and struggles in Bihzad's mind the novel explores the tension between the emperor's liberal and tolerant religious policy and his straitjacketed sexuality that expresses itself in hunts and conquests. The mosaic created by Akbar's policy of assimilating different religions is sharply contrasted with the violence released by the challenge to the patriarchal patterns of determined sexuality. These are the tensions that inspire and interrogate Bihzad's life as an artist—should he bow to the demands of the emperor and join his harem of artists, or should he paint his own deepest desires. What is the role of representational art in religion—should Islam yield to the Christian icon of the mother-and-child, "The lady" of the Catholic Church? Bihzad is plagued with doubts and questions about his role as an artist, to the extent that he resolves not to paint any more, no, not even to see the world around him—he blindfolds himself. Reduced to a beggar, he takes up with the dance and song of the Sufis, the energy and harmony of their mystical embraces. The story ends with Bihzad's return to Akbar's court—he had not known that the order for his exile had been repealed long back. The year is 1605; the great Jallaluddin Muhammed Akbar is lying on his deathbed. Akbar's last action is to remove Bihzad's blindfold: Akbar tells him 'You are a saint, Bihzad. Only a saint is truly blind, seeing only the God within him. But I want you to turn into an artist for the last time.'

So Bihzad paints a picture of ecstasy: 'Sama. The dance of ecstasy and death. The Sufis danced in a garden under the moon, arms raised, faces glistening in the light of stars. It was the night of the chosen one. At the centre he drew Akbar dancing in a trance ... the emperor as the prophet, flaming in a golden fire as he ascended to heaven ... he drew Akbar like the dark god of the infidels, the god of love'. This is the resolution, the mystical union between the dance of creation and the dance of death, between art and religion.

The Miniaturist is a fascinating reconstruction of several paintings from the *Akbarnama*, which it would appear, is the writer's inspiration as it is also his subject. He brings to life the great paintings that he describes and interprets vividly. These verbal renderings of the paintings intersperse the narrative of the painter's life and its dilemmas. They emerge as the high points in the artist Bihzad's life, which, imaginatively recreated by Basu, interleaves the *Akbarnama*, or is it the other way around? It is difficult to say, as art contemplates art; the artist must not succumb to the logic of order; rather, the truth lies in the epitaph on Rumi's grave that runs as refrain through the narrative: 'When we are dead seek not a tomb in the earth, find it among a million hearts.' ■

Nalini Jain is Professor of English in Delhi University, Delhi.

Twining and Intertwining

G.J.V. Prasad

A HOUSE IN RANIKHET

By Keki N. Daruwalla

Rupa & Co, 2003, pp. 226, Rs. 195.00

It would not be wrong to say the short story is very big in many Indian languages, but in Indian English it has not had the same impact. Once a German critic said to me that Indian critics have neglected the Indian English short story and then proceeded to give me a long bibliography of collections of short stories that we had not found fit to examine. But the real question is how visible is the Indian English short story to the general reader? Where can an Indian English writer publish her short stories? Which mass circulation magazines would take these stories to Indian readers? There is an embarrassing paucity of publication avenues and hence a lack of visibility of the genre itself. So if you like the short story you end up buying collections, many of which can be indifferent or uneven in quality. To pick up a collection of short stories written by a single writer is an even greater gamble—what if you don't like even one story? This is why we approach Indian English short story collections with extreme caution!

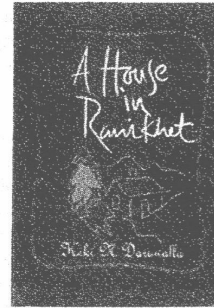
Picking up Keki Daruwalla's collection of stories wasn't such a gamble but I remembered what a colleague said to me once—that it was failed poets who made the best short story writers! Alas, Daruwalla does not fall in that category, having already established himself as simply the best contemporary Indian English poet. But I knew I didn't need to worry for this is his third short story collection. He is essentially a poet but one who successfully crosses over the skills honed over years to a different genre. The question then really was how good this collection was going to be and the answer is that Daruwalla is simply and wonderfully himself in the sixteen stories that this book contains.

Daruwala sets the tone in the first story itself—'Going' is a simply told story of relationship between generations, of the bonds between a grandmother and her granddaughter. You realize that Daruwalla is not so much interested in the story as in the telling; he is interested in character and mood and the cultural matrix and language, and yes, the patterns that make our lives. Keki plays around with the staple ingredients of the short story. There is humour and irony—but that is because the real raconteur of these tales is an urbane personality; there is the unexpected ending—but that is because people are human; but there are chunks of the narrative that don't contribute to the action of the story at all—and

that is because life is full of bits that won't fall into place, it is very often not the episodes that make our life that are important but the bits that escape the narrative intent. Daruwalla pushes us and the genre to accommodate more than the story.

A number of stories are about spaces between relationships, stories of life carrying on with an inexorable logic of their own. This is true of 'Going', of 'The Jogger', as of 'An Ache in the Arm', or most others. How can we ever gauge our impact on each other? But impact we do have in ways we may never fathom. The delightful 'Trojan Horse' is about a Trojan horse of the live kind (which does not contain an ounce of treachery) and about the need to live with the past—a concern that Daruwalla deals with in other stories (as in his poems). If 'Islands' shows how history can be a bane—chronicles only recording and thus perpetuating conflict; the two Alexander stories that end the volume tackle the question differently—we should not only live with the past, but should we not derive the right lessons from it? How difficult it is to do so is made clear in his biting satire, 'The Story of the Seminar'. No one comes out clean in this story—neither the historians (who are "withering" Indian History in their haste to chart new paths for it), nor the politicians, nor even the "secular" media. There is a certain bitterness with the loss of space for liberals that raises its head sometimes in Daruwalla's writings.

This is the liberalism that can be taken for a ride but makes for endearing human qualities including a sense of humour. This is exhibited best in the story that gives the title to the book, *A House in Ranikhet*. Even rogues are to be appreciated and given their due. The group of stories set in Ranikhet are only loosely related to each other and three of them are actually stories within stories, so to say. What is a life story? What is history? How do they impinge on each other? How do you know either? These issues are foregrounded by these stories. What Daruwalla makes you realize is that none of the stories are final, nor are they the only stories to be told, nor even is the point of view to be privileged. A myriad of stories are intermingling around us all the time; Daruwalla's attempt is to separate the thread of one even as he realizes that it is connected to other threads and also that some parts of the thread cannot be separated at all! There is no attempt at formal containment, no energy wasted on



telling a clear story. This is most apparent in the next four stories, 'The Retired Panther', 'Life in the Big City', 'A Job Like Any Other', and 'Monologue in Harsinghpur Gola'. The last three are stories about crime and society (including the police), which not only record the complex web that binds various sections of humanity but also show life from below.

All in all a good read—a collection for the train journey as well as the book shelf. ■

G.J.V. Prasad discusses life and literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

BOOK NEWS

BOOK NEWS

Rajasthan an Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari by Rustom Bharucha is an epic style narrative that celebrates the living traditions of the desert.

Penguin Books, India, 2003, pp. 358, Rs. 325.00

The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai Volume 1 edited by B.R. Nanda covers the period upto 1900.

Manohar Books, 2003, pp. 422, Rs. 700.00

Giving Away the Girl and Other Plays by Malini Bhattacharya and translated by Sarmistha Dutta Gupta and Paramita Banerjee are three street plays from the women's movement written in the 1980s.

Seagull, Calcutta, 2003, pp. 56, Rs. 150.00

Begum Barve by Satish Alekar is a Marathi play about a small time female impersonator translated by Shanta Gokhale.

Seagull, Calcutta, 2003, pp. 81, Rs. 160.00

Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi: Essays on Indian History and Culture by Vinay Lal offers a 'dissenting, futurist and hermeneutic' perspective on Indian civilization and various aspects of the modern cultural history of India.

Seagull, Calcutta, 2003, pp. 224, Rs. 525.00

Oh! For the Realms of the Spirit

Navtej Sarna

IN TIMES OF SIEGE

By Githa Hariharan

Viking, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 206, Rs. 295.00

The first few pages of Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* quicken the reader's pulse. Fifty-two year old Professor Shiv Murthy drives to a University girls hostel and picks up his young ward who has just broken a leg. Immediately she sets up a brilliant conspiracy scenario by insisting that he not tell her parents that she has broken a leg and is staying in his house for some weeks. Add to that the fact that the professor's wife, a martinet of sorts from all accounts, is nowhere in sight. In fact she is far away in Seattle under the pointed shadow of the Sky Needle. Endless possibilities scurry around these pages and the reader settles back with a long nimboopani in delighted anticipation. What do we have here? An Indian version of *Lolita*, even if slightly grown-up? Or an Indian version of Coetzee's *Disgrace*? Will temptation do in the staid, diffident professor? Will Seattle prove too far a town for the hold of marital fidelity..... And when the Professor, in what is obviously an uncharacteristic move takes long leave and begins to help with the housework just to be in close proximity of his twenty-four year old ward, the scene seems set for a battle royale between temptation and habit, traditional fears and the desire to jump.

Just then—and quite regretfully at least for this reader—Githa Hariharan chooses to shift gear. Convinced, it would appear, of the need not just to write a novel, but also to make an unambiguous political statement, she drops the tale of temptations and begins a predictable tale of liberal versus fundamentalists or "fundoos" as we get to know them. A lesson by Shiv about the twelfth century reformer poet Basava becomes the centerpiece of discord between the two groups. Arrayed against him and his friends is the Itihās Suraksha Manch, the self-professed protectors of history. The ambiguities of the long dead Basava, his challenge to caste and his iconoclasm do not go down well with the more uniform and saintly image that this group would rather project.

Inevitably then follows the confrontation, the uncomfortable juxtaposition of the right with the left. The novel unfortunately meanders down the path of predictable plotting and posturing. The academics divide—the fundamentalists reveal their true colours, the rest try, without much conviction, to hang together. The higher-ups seem to be just waiting for an opportunity to lose their spine. The young ones—friends of his ward Meena—plan over potato chips and coke to fight back, revolution

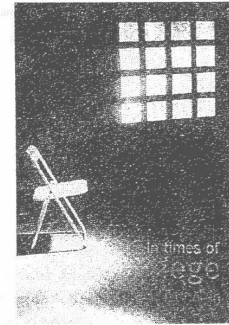
against counter-revolution. The media gets into the act; anonymous callers swing into action.

In the midst of all this, Shiv cuts a sympathetic figure, convincingly lost, unable it seems to fathom the enormity of the furore he has caused, yearning for normalcy and simplicity. The unlikely hero finds himself caught in the vortex of a historic moment. He has to stand up and be counted. But it seems he would rather be following his daily routine of planning lessons for distance learning, drinking chai in the corridor canteen, making occasional desultory love with a colleague. Or if he cannot do that, it appears he would rather just disappear to a mysterious end. Like Basava did, leaving the city and the movement he had started collapsing behind him. Like Shiv's father did, disillusioned by the actual achievement of the freedom that he had helped fight for, getting off the train at a station and never coming back.

Now that would have been a story... But Hariharan puts Shiv through the grill. He appears in TV interviews, speaks at functions, plots and plans, takes himself seriously. And all for the sake of a not very original message, the truth that Basava sees in the glimmering river: that cross currents can coexist, that rapids and the most placid of waters are fellow travellers, that there is more than just one way of looking at things. And hate mongers exist today as they did in the twelfth century.

For a brief while towards the end, Hariharan seems to go back to the book that she originally started with. Once again Shiv's struggle is not with the "fundoos" or those castigating his lesson but with the twenty-four year old temptation still lying in his study, waiting to get the cast off her leg. There is a clumsy, half sexual encounter and then she is gone, back into her world, confident, decisive and, above all, young. At that moment, the political part of the book seems irrelevant, almost unnecessary.

Don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with the book as it is. It works fine as a novel; some would say, a useful novel, demanded by the times to fight the forces of darkness. But as a lover of fiction, I would rather prefer to tread not through the known territory of newspaper columns but through the realms of the spirit, the oddities of the mind, the vagrancies of the heart. Just imagine if Githa Hariharan had carried on the story of a fifty-two year old Professor on leave, his



twenty-four year old ward in a plaster cast in his study, his wife thousands of miles away... a Professor wishing to learn the mysteries of unknown life, like his father did when he just upped and got off at a nondescript railway station and never returned. ■

Navtej Sarna is presently the spokesperson for the Foreign Office in Delhi and is the author of *We weren't Lovers Like That* (Penguin, 2003).

Communication

The cover featuring Nehru delighted and amused me, because without your knowing it your designer cropped every person out of the frame, except me!



Well if you think I am making it up, then the tall man behind Nehru, whose head is cut off, is my uncle Surjit Singh Majithia, then Deputy Defence Minister. I have a newspaper cutting of this stuck in my autograph book with Nehru's signature.

Last year I made a photographic montage, a triptych with 18 'stills' of Nehru and Amrita-Sher-Gil called 'Meeting in Gorakhpur, 1940'. This is just before he is arrested and then goes to Dehra Dun jail for 13 months.

Your designer has made an artwork for me!

Since I have been using existing photographic material and making digital interventions, as you know from the review you carried on 'Retake of Amrita', I would like to 'use' your cover as a 'found object' and make some photographic prints.

Vivan Sundaram, New Delhi

Nandan – Then and Now

P.A. Krishnan

THE LEGEND OF NANDAN (NANDAN KATHAI)

By Indira Parthasarathy. Translated from the Tamil by C.T. Indira
Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 82, Rs. 195.00

The legend of Nandan germinated as a one-line reference in Sundarar's *Tevaram* written in the eighth century AD. It took three more centuries for it to grow into a verse in Nambi-Andar-Nambi's *Thiruvandanthi*. The legend became full-bodied in Sekkizhar's *Periya Puranam*, a twelfth century classic. In fact, the person who was simply referred to in the above works as 'Thirunalaippar'—one who will go tomorrow—gets his name, Nandanar, for the first time in Sekkizhar's work and an entire chapter is devoted to him.

The word 'nanda' in Sanskrit means joy, delight or happiness. Indeed, Sekkizhar's Nandan is an embodiment of joy and he exclaims 'I stand redeemed!', when the brahmins of Chidambaram inform him that he has been ordered by the Lord to walk through fire. He is, however, not a person who wants to rebel against his servile status. He simply wants to worship the Lord at Chidambaram. One tends to think that it must have surely surprised Nandan that the ordeal by fire has transformed him into a *Muni* 'with the sacred thread dangling on his chest'. It is this unexpected (or enforced) brahminhood that had perhaps made him a doyen of Siva's Saints, the Nayanars. He is one of the very few Nayanars who are mentioned in Sanskrit works. Umaphathi Sivacharya's important *Kunchitangristava* (*The Hymn of Praise to [Nataraja's] Curved Feet*), written in the early part of the fourteenth century mentions Nandan's legend. Another Sanskrit work *Hemasabhanatha Mahatmya* devotes an entire chapter to Nandan and repeats, almost word by word, the story told by Sekkizhar in Tamil.

The story of Nandan became immensely popular only after Gopala Krishna Bharathi wrote his *Thirunalaippar Chartira Kirtanai* in 1861. Swaminatha Iyer who made a superb sketch of Bharathi in his *Sangita Mummanikal* says that Bharathi's work was in such demand that its second edition was printed the very next year. He also writes that Bharathi chose Nandan's story because he too was a devotee of Nataraja and whenever he visited Chidambaram he used to stand near the figure of Nandan sculpted on a wall in the temple and worship the Lord. Bharathi's intention was certainly not to paint Nandan in colours of rebellion, but since he wanted to introduce drama in his work, he created an arrogant brahmin landlord who initially looks askance at his servitor's devotion beyond his lowly station but is persuaded when Nandan starts performing miracles. But Bharathi's portrayal of the oppressed was so real that his work has become, unwittingly, a social

commentary of his times. No one remembers the Vedanti that Bharathi tries to make out of Nandan. No one remembers too the other two untouchables, Thillai Vettian and Petraan Saamban, who are supposed to have attained salvation at Chidambaram. Nandan lives perhaps because of his immolation.

The fire that had roasted alive 44 dalit workers at Kilvenmani, on the Christmas day of 1968 might have died on that very day but its memories were iridescent embers in the hearts of sensitive Tamils for many years. Parthasarathy wrote a book on the incident, which had perhaps failed to douse what was simmering within him. He therefore came out with his play, *Nandan Kathai*, in 1978 to make a statement that dalits like Nandan could never bring joy to his brethren in the real world.

In Parthasarathy's version the brahmin landlord transforms into a scheming trio, one clever brahmin assisted by two villainous non-brahmins. Nandan has a Devadasi, Abhirami, to lean on. The miracles become clever ruses to make Nandan believe that he is indeed the Chosen One. Only when he and Abhirami are being consumed by fire does Nandan realize what the wily brahmin has done to him. Parthasarathy says in his note that the entire play is a stylized drama. Stylized it is with almost every character symbolizing what the author thinks is a dominant trait of an oppressing caste or an oppressed one. Nandan and Abhirami are the exceptions that stand out and, naturally, perish.

C.T. Indira has done a stupendous job in translating this very difficult play. I am amazed at her diligence and unswerving commitment to the task—important qualities for a scholar that are woefully missing among those who are supposed to hold aloft the banner of Tamil literature. Her references are meticulous and her introduction is impeccable. The only problem is that the diversity of dialects and the astounding interspersed of subtexts from Tamil poetry in the original Tamil version, which spectacularly enhances the dramatic content of the play, can never be convincingly repeated in English. The translator has tried to solve this problem by some very competent translations of the Tamil poems but a few of them tend to be tedious and they stem the flow of the play.

The unexpected bonus is a critical essay by the translator which is appended to the play. Viewing the play with the goggles of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, she says that it was essential for the traditional society to keep in circulation Nandan's story as a strategy of public management of anxiety. Who were anxious? The dalits? *Periya Puranam* and the Sanskrit works in which Nandan's story finds a place were certainly not meant for the dalits. They would have never been allowed to attend the public discourses of *Periya Puranam*. Sanskrit, on the other hand, would have been beyond them.

The story might have well been written as a

salve for the bruised souls of thinking brahmins to assure them that there could indeed be a tortuous way for the oppressed to attain salvation. She also says that Sekkizhar might have chosen this story to rally the Hindus against the rise of Jainism and Buddhism. The trouble with this line of argument is that it does not take into account two obvious factors: firstly, Jainism and Buddhism were no longer as influential in the twelfth century as they were in the earlier ones and secondly, the ongoing battles between the Saivaites and Vaishnavites were so bitter and acrimonious during this period that they had no time for rallying the Hindus—even if they were aware that they belonged to this mega-religion.

In the final paragraph of her essay Indira Parthasarathy quotes the following from Ryan: *a key task for a cultural materialist is to read the canon against the grain: to amplify the voice of the disenfranchised; to expose the guilty political unconscious of the text; to deepen and widen the fault lines in its legitimization of the status quo.* I agree with her in that Indira Parthasarathy's cultural agenda was perhaps in tune with this comment when he wrote the play. But she proceeds from here to make a statement that the author rehistoricizes the Bhakti movement in India through this work. This indeed sounds grand but is too simplistic. Literature is littered with the corpses of such works that had tried to make similar attempts. Bhakti movement is a giant canvas and Nandan's story is but a dot in it. Even in the Tamil country there are other legends concerning the dalits that are radically different from Nandan's. Thirupanalwar's is one of them. He rides the back of a Brahmin priest to worship the Lord of Srirangam. It is very difficult to interpret this story with the tools used for Nandan's. One could no doubt lump the stories together and interpret them as sordid strategic ploys to hoodwink the dalits. But then only a die-hard cultural materialist will accept such an interpretation.

I read the original version in Tamil when it appeared in the magazine *Kanaiyazhi* and the last scene of dalits running helter-skelter in fear remained with me for a long time. But the possibility that this play could make a brilliant opéra comique (not comic opera) escaped me at that time. Now I realize that Parthasarathy's play is not only a riot of competing colours and contending dance forms of the Tamils but it is also a fine tribute to their wonderful poetry, variegated music and, above all, their litting local idioms. If it is staged in an acoustically sound auditorium by a team of professionals—the dialogues could be in English but at least a few of the songs should be in Tamil—it will be a lifetime experience for the viewers. But what will remain with them for a long time will be its magnificence and not its message. As regards its message, Parthasarathy himself, if he were to write the play today, would have written it differently. Perhaps that is what New Historicism is all about. ■

P.A. Krishnan, a senior officer with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, is a writer.

Roots & Rootlessness

Bibhuti Mishra

THE FACES AND OTHER STORIES

By Dibyendu Palit. Translated from the Bangla by Santanu Sinha Chaudhuri
Indialog Publications, 2002, pp. 253, Rs. 195.00

If one were to look for the known canons of a short story one would be in for a surprise here. Dibyendu Palit's stories have none of them; yet they are completely rivetting. There are no dramatic twists and turns in the story, no Henry-esque endings or even Maupassian delineation of character; Palit is content to chronicle a telling moment or a series of them, delve into a moving situation, usually the inner landscape of a person caught in the quotidian tension between intention and interpretation. There is this old woman Sudha in the title story. Consigned to an old age home she finds her children becoming 'visitors'. She reaches out to them through letters that tell cooked up stories about visits of her dear ones. Why does she do that? Is she losing her head? Is she imagining things? She is, in fact, trying to relate to the lost world of her home, her family peopled by loving, caring men and women. It hits her son when he realizes this. It hits the readers too and the sheer pain of loneliness sears the heart. It is a story of roots and rootlessness, of the rupture of the umbilical cord!

Dibyendu Palit is anything but melodramatic as he records the pathos and swirling passions of men and women in the twelve stories collected here. There are a lot of openings for exaggerated treatment of emotion and mushiness but Palit steadfastly refrains from playing to the gallery. Still the most ordinary happenings and the most ordinary goings-on in the inner world of men take on an uncanny aura of unfamiliarity and cast a spell. Ashish Nandy rightly calls the ace storyteller 'a psycho-biographer of everydayness'.

In the opening story 'Advent' poor Priyanath and his family wait for the advent of a celebrity whose visit could be impressive and raise their status in others' esteem. The celebrity does come but after he leaves the Priyanath family becomes isolated. They no longer belong to the people around them. It has a tragic consequence—one day the door is broken open to find their dead bodies. Nobody bothers to find out how it happened and why. But the writer winds up the story with the statement: "People said that such incidents often happened after the advent of a great man" thus giving a sudden surreal twist and an eerie edge to an earthily real tale.

Palit uses language evocatively and thus creates an ambience which could be 'wrapped around like a shawl'. This is very much in evidence in 'Jetlag' where Haimanti coming back from America is resigned to ceaseless

brooding about her past, her present and the culture shock she seems to have been subjected to in her own Calcutta and in 'Antara' where the eponymous character is the unhappily married wife of a failing cricketer.

'Alam's own house' is one of the most moving stories in the collection that operates on physical, psychological and symbolic levels. Alam's family moves to Dhaka to occupy Anantasekhar's house that is acquired in exchange for theirs in Kolkata. Alam falls in love with Raka, Ananta babu's daughter; but when he comes back to Kolkata from Dhaka on work with a secret desire to 'claim' Raka finds to his utter shock that he has become a victim of psychological partition if not political partition. But the writer underplays the shock and ends the tale with a touch of irony. Alam leaves his own (?) house where he was twice born and perhaps twice dead.

Irony is in fact a strong point of Palit and he uses it with clinical effectiveness. While there are ironic touches in most stories the approach to at least three 'The Birth and Death of Mother Teresa', 'National flag' and 'Values' thrives on dark irony. In 'The Birth and Death of Mother Teresa' a sick child Putul is being taken to a nursing home where Mother Teresa is also admitted. She is all excitement and dreams of becoming another Mother Teresa. But she cannot reach the nursing home, as there is a roadblock for the Prime minister's visit to see the Mother! In 'National flag' Hazari Mandol who came to participate in a rally in Calcutta and lost his wife dies a tragic death when he falls down while stealing the 'national flag' to sell it on Independence day for a few square meals. In the 'Values' Jahar while driving the car hits an old woman but instead of repenting he hands over the car to his chauffeur to drive. Jahar relaxes, reassured that there is no reason to worry, for, even if somebody had noted the car number the chauffeur would be held responsible.

'Brazil' has football-crazy Kinkar rooting for Brazil's win over France while 'Gavaskar' captures the helplessness of a father taking his terminally ill son to see the cricketing hero.

On the one hand the writer expertly exposes the dark, esoteric yet enchanting underbelly of the human mind and on the other he infuses a kind of dignity to the deepest despair as is the case in 'Saviour'. Palit sets his stories in Calcutta but though he does not attend to minute physical evocation of the city while chronicling the lower and the lower-middle class, the ambience is very much Calcuttan. The language has a flourish and felicity which makes even sustained treatment of despair a good read. While the translation has a high level of adequacy the sudden shifts of tense from past to present and back often gives a jarring note. ■

Bibhuti Mishra is a freelance writer and critic based in Bhubaneswar. He also edits the book review magazine *Bahi Jagat*.



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A Palimpsest of Imagery

Jane Bhandari

THE MAP-MAKER

By Keki Daruwalla

Ravi Dayal, 2002, New Delhi, pp. 68, Rs. 90.00

Much of Daruwalla's work recalls that of Edith Sitwell, with its strong sense of the past. In his earlier poetry there is an immense vista perceptible behind the immediate present of which he speaks, which provides the setting for almost all of his poems. What teases at the mind as one reads this widely varied collection is the feeling that this is a palimpsest, a fine tracery of overlapping images, of religion, legend, memory, seers and mythical kings, shards of remembered mythology revealed like geological specimens discovered in the course of a journey.

The first part of *The Map-maker* is an internal murmuring, ruminations on religion, war, and map-making. Using various personae Daruwalla moves through the history and geography of civilization and its myths and legends, writing of the Magi, magical kings, stars, and immense distances. These motifs constantly recur, the reference sometimes fleeting and oblique, so that one flips back and forth between the pages to read the links between the poems.

In *Old Sailor*, the narrator no longer watches for outward signs, the stars that he once steered by, or consulted for a horoscope, but looks inward, listening to the ageing body:

the voice of the vertebrae, the neck's sudden crick,

a bulge somewhere - the shabby heraldry of gout.

The knock at the slowly closing doors of the heart.

In the beginning there was no birth, no old age or death, only trance. And when the Absolute was distracted from its trance, Maya appeared, leaping and shimmering into ephemeral existence, and

*birth was born
so that death could come into
existence.*

The image of Maya is as vivid as that of the sea-gull 'caught in a molten silver moment' by war-time searchlights, seen by the soldier who fears he will die.

Central to the whole collection of poems is 'The Map-maker'. Daruwalla is himself a map-maker, delineating a geography for us to explore, and including, as did the old map-makers, the symbols of myth and legend, of fabulous kingdoms and rivers of gold. He draws the mountain chains 'with rain-gods in

their armpits' and glaciers 'like glass-slayers in their folds', puts in deserts, seas, and islands. The old map-makers were enthralled by 'the boundaries of inconceivable distance'. They drew fabulous beings in their maps, rivers of gold, trade routes, and sea-lanes with favourable winds. Their maps bring the same sense of vast distance as the Magi brought to the shepherd. This is a wide-ranging journey, from a star that has itself travelled unimaginably far, leading dusty travelers who speak to a man who has never moved more than a few miles from his village. The map-symbols are not of gold and unbelievable riches, but of immense distance.

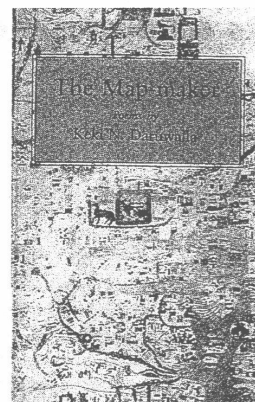
We should no longer need the old signs and symbols: do we still need maps? Can we forget markings that separate deserts from swamps and indicate seas that have sunk an island in a cyclone? Yet these symbols are necessary: they are what make the environment that he has created so arresting, so immediate, though, as Daruwalla says, you cannot map lust, or desire, only the reefs. The sea itself becomes a symbol, rummaging among the lines he has drawn, talking to itself, as searchers do. From mapping the earth, to mapping the skies: confronting the cold astral fires of the universe, Daruwalla recalls Borges; a mirror reflecting the sky throbs with space. The images of mirror, sea, sky, star, and time constantly recur. Daruwalla is creating a new geography, of the uncertain present, and an unknowable future. And if you map the future, he says,

*... while a millennium
moves on its hinges, you may find
the present turned to an anachronism.*

As the millennium turns on its hinges, space and time and prognostication continue to occupy the writer's mind. Even as he leaves the sea 'scribbling loudly on shingle,' he turns his back on the Pole Star: he needs no guide to prayer. As the century ends, he prays that for the next hundred years all creatures, from arctic birds to elephants, should have an easy time of it. The last verse is touchingly specific:

*And a small skylight prayer, Lord:
May the sparrow know glass
from the crisp air outside.*

At 'the black taper-end of the embering millennium' the spool of time unwinds seamless years, unendingly, like Draupadi's sari. The old questions are still being asked. Did the



universe begin, will it end? What is prophesied? What are our instructions for dealing with space and time? And there are still miracles: the world has not ended, we have moved from 'the black taper-end of the embering millennium' to a new era:

*This miracle, the world dragged by
Time's oxen
Into another furrow, another seedbed,
another age.*

One is immediately reminded of M. F. Hussain's glass-paintings based on the Parsi creation story.

The last poem is an African legend, the tale of Farlimas, who rescued the king Akaf and his sister Sali from death by telling stories each night to the priests, so that they forgot to watch the skies for the portents of the king's imminent immolation:

*For the story was hashish,
And the breath of hashish
And they heard flute-players though
there were no flutes*

*And when he talked of dreams
they actually dreamt.*

But it was the priests who died, killed by their own poisoned daggers. The stars and portents had been by-passed,

*And never again were kings slaugh-
tered like lambs.
The years went by, round and mellow
like perfect fruit.
Each year the river rose to the city's
shins,
Hoers sank to their ankles in the mud
And the fields laughed with water.*

The Map-maker is Keki Daruwalla's ninth collection of verse. ■

Jane Bhandari is a Mumbai writer and painter and has lived in India for over 35 years. She has published two collections of poems.

True Notes and False

Latika Padgaonkar

SONG SUNG TRUE: A MEMOIR

By Malka Pukhraj. Translated from the Urdu by Saleem Kidwai.
Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 377, Rs 400.00

More than the astonishing life Malka Pukhraj led is her astonishing sense of its recall. And it is in this selective and skewed remembrance that her personality is embedded. Not a personality, I am afraid, that is rounded or attractive. Pukhraj might be a great singer of thumris, ghazals and dadras and a recipient of top honours in both India and Pakistan, but if this book is indeed her life's true song, then Pukhraj the woman hardly emerges a winner.

The two parts of the book (is this her division or the translator's?) are a measure of how she sees her life. Part I takes the major share. Its 262 pages deal with her childhood, particularly the nine years (from the age of 9 onwards) spent at the durbar of Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu & Kashmir. Part II (pages 263-376) covers the rest of her life, roughly from the early 20s up until her grandmotherly days. And a curious fact but one worth noting is that, except for Partition, nowhere does her memoir mention a date, a year or an age. Events may as well have happened outside the landmarks of time.

The story of Malka's life begins with the 'miracle' of her birth in a village near Jammu: her mother's long and difficult labour and the intervention of Baba Roti Ram, a local 'saint' vide the prescription of a *pakori* – and lo, the "worst was over". Baba, who spoke only Dogri, gave the baby an Urdu name – Malka, meaning empress – and predicted that she would reign one day. Meanwhile, a childless aunt, who had waited for her birth with much zeal, called her Pukhraj, i.e., topaz.

Malka grew up in a large family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and was the apple of their eye. Yet, what marked her was not the abundant care and love she received but the haughtiness of a disdainful mother. Malka describes her as "severely pock-marked" with "really horrible skin", "severe, easily enraged and suspicious." Gulzar Begum harboured a smothering ambition for her daughter, trying, perhaps, to achieve through her what she could not achieve herself. No jokes or laughter lit up her life, and if she loved her daughter, she never showed it. Nor did Malka love her in any special way. "If she had to go away for a few days, I would be most pleased and would pray that she did not have to return in a hurry." This legacy endured. Malka confesses she never embraced her own children either. "However," she writes half-apologetically, "I have always been friendly to (them)."

Her recollections of her early years set the tone for her obsessions as an adult. As a 3 year-old she cut her teeth in music under a distant

cousin who owned a paan-bidi-syrup shop. Malka would hang around the shop to learn, then run off to her father in a gambling den nearby and demand money. Her harvest she would keep in a box and count two or three times a day. However, when her father pleaded for some money to entertain unexpected guests, Malka was loath to give: "Definitely not. Do not touch my money."

At 4 she began smoking the huqqa. If caught, her mother would beat her "mercilessly", but her strong craving led her to take quick drags and almost faint with the effort. She even took to smoking cigarette stubs she gathered from the streets. The cocky little thing (no age given but she couldn't be more than 5) managed the affairs of the shop with "quick efficiency", prepared delectable paans, sent provisions to the Ustad's house, treated patients for constipation and stomach aches and charged twice the amount the Ustad did!

Childish pranks? Surely. But it's curious, this involvement with money. It flows as a powerful current in her life, partly as nostalgia for how cheap things once were, and partly as a definition of her world: she stole money from the shop; she snatched it as a right from her father ("I pursued him till he died"); she "shamelessly" and ever so often asked Shabbir (whom she would later marry) for more money than he earned. She lets go of no opportunity to speak of prices: of houses and property, of land and cars, of gold and silver, meat and vegetables, train tickets and cinema tickets, and the price of girls who were bought and sold and forced into prostitution. ("Kashmiri girls fetched huge prices. One reason was that in the places—Bombay, Calcutta, Madras—everyone was dark.")

Having trained next with Ustad Ali Baksh, father of Bade Ghuman Ali, Malka left for Delhi to learn music and dance. Precocious and talented, her fame ran ahead of her by the time she returned to Jammu at the age of—nine(?). By this time her Urdu was "so good that there was no book I could not read. I had also become an expert at poetry." As a matter of fact her expertise in Urdu went further back in time: "By the age of 5 or 6," she writes modestly, "I was able to read the most difficult of books."

In Jammu she sang 'nohas' and 'marsiyas' during Muharram and went on to become a singer at the court of Maharaja Hari Singh. From then on began a strange relationship with a Maharaja old enough to be her father. He enjoyed her singing, showered her with money-jewellery-clothes, lifted her to the status of a gazetted officer, took her along on picnics,



hunts, barbecues and visits to Srinagar. He joked and laughed with her, cooked and sang with her, teased her, cared for her and praised her. Malka revelled in this luxury, in this vantage point for observing royal life carefully and for long. Indeed, several chapters of the book are devoted to the comings and goings of various Maharajas, to their regalia and idiosyncrasies, their wives and dowries and life styles; she pauses to describe Holi and dusserah, polo and shikar, as well as women who tried—and failed—to curry royal favour.

Her first encounter with the Maharaja was both embarrassing and arrogant. Unaware, ungroomed or forgetful of court etiquette, Malka committed one *faux pas* after another, to the titter of the audience. When she sat down to tie ghungroos, an ADC rushed to her and said: "Do not point your feet towards the Maharaja. It is disrespectful." I moved my feet away in another direction but he returned and said, "You are still being disrespectful." I was irritated and reacted loudly. "If I cannot stretch my legs in either this direction or in that, where should I put my feet? On my head?"

Far from angering Hari Singh, her spunk—even, what she herself calls, her bad behaviour—drew from him both condescension and admiration. In any event, it allowed her to take liberties. Consider this: There would be cooking sessions with the Maharaja and she would assist. Once he asked: "Is there no food at home that you eat here every night?" Stung to the core, she decided then and there she would not eat in the court any more and told the Maharaja. "I have vowed everything here is *haram* for me... From now on, eating anything here is akin to eating pig." A lesser mortal would have lost his head for such outrage.

The good days—the years when Malka seemed truly happy—poised between her unspoken love for Hari Singh and her duties as a subject were over following Hindu-Muslim riots. Something snapped in the heart of the secular Maharaja. He grew dejected and withdrawn. Rumours flew around about the wealth and honour he had bestowed on a greedy and disloyal Malka and how she was trying to poison him. Malka left Jammu with a heavy heart and under a dark cloud. She moved to Lahore and never referred to those years again.

The second part of the book is not just devoid of the colour that was liberally splashed across the first half, it's a sad testament to the

kind of person she grew into. Young Syed Shabbir Hussain Shah was struck by Malka as if by a bolt of lightning. This lachrymose and sentimental man with a never-say-die spirit pursued her like the Furies, often surrendering good sense, dignity and professional conduct for her sake. For six years Malka who seemed not to know her mind played cat-and-mouse with him in the most appalling way, needling and castigating him, dismissing or postponing proposals of marriage, always deaf to his pleas ("Let's see what happens," she would say when he proposed for the nth time. "What is meant to happen will happen because Allah wants it that way."), tearing up his letters, insulting him by handing over the little bitch he had given her to someone else under his very nose ("You had to see Shabbir's face to believe it: anger, sorrow, helplessness writ large, his face the colour of blazing copper. 'You have hurt me like you have never hurt me before,' Shabbir said. Indifferently I replied, 'What am supposed to do now? You always start a weeping-fuss over everything.'")

The worst of Pukhraj shows up here, in these pages, where brazenly and remorselessly she writes of his humiliation and her shallowness. But playing harsh chords on the strings of his heart is only part of the tale. Between her confusing (for the reader) acquisition and sale of land and houses, her piano lessons and massages, her role in films and her hand at production, her extensive travels and socializing, she found the time and inclination to thump a double-dealer ten times on the head with her shoe!

We must read up to the second last page of her book to learn that between the taunts she threw at Shabbir, Malka did have six children. No names are given, but we learn of the families they are married into and how they are "kind, obedient, brave, honourable, considerate." One turned out to be the proverbial black sheep. To the children—as to her devotee, Shabbir—she showed no love whatsoever. Little wonder, then, that when Shabbir died, Malka's world collapsed in a hurry and divine retribution, as it were, set in. Her friends faded away, her children stopped calling her, no one needed her any more. It took Shabbir's death to bring home to her his worth—and possibly her own lack of it.

But perhaps the strangest note in the memoir of a singer is the complete lack of any musical comment of note. The music of Allah, Ali and Mian Maula Bakhsh she describes as "voices steeped in passion, (with) the magical power to make listeners forget themselves. They were icons of sur, experts at musical articulation." Her all too few reflections on music remain at this level, no more insightful than a fresh young critic trying his hand at music criticism for the first time.

Pity. Malka Pukhraj had a style and flair in her voice. Her life did not reflect any of these qualities. ■

Latika Padgaonkar is the Executive editor of *Cinemaya*, the *Asian Film Quarterly* and a columnist with *The Pioneer*.

Evocative Travelogue

Laila Tyabji

DREAMS OF THE DRAGON'S CHILDREN

By Navroze Contractor
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2003. pp: 257, Rs. 250.00

Navroze Contractor wrote a book, *Dreams of the Dragon's Children*, about a journey to China, and set me travelling down a 40 year long journey to my past.

Today, Navroze is an internationally acclaimed film cameraman, and I am Dastkar's 'craft-y' lady. In 1963 we were both freshers at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, hoping to become "real Artists". I was a particularly wimpy, awkward young sixteen, straight out of the elite cocoon of an all-girls boarding school; Navroze was a little older, very much part of the 60s—with his beard, broken nose, ripped blue jeans, and battered scooter. At a time when University students, especially in Gujarat, were still in oiled-hair, pressed-pant mode, his rubber chappals, left wing views, and shaggy, verging-on-the-wild-side style marked him out instantly as an original spirit. Most people's mothers were housewives; his was a puppeteer of world renown!

For some reason we instantly befriended each other, despite my introverted, silly mouse ways. (In those days I found books much easier to deal with than people.) We went to classes together, and sat around on the steps of the rambling Fine Arts campus, drinking tea and thrashing the world. When I left Baroda for Japan, two years later, we began a correspondence that continued sporadically through the decades—Navroze's letters always lively, always iconoclastic; marked by an eye for humour, pathos, human frailty; the beautiful and the unexpected. Even the envelopes were elaborately embellished collector's pieces, though I never knew till I read *Dreams of the Dragon's Children* that he was also a master forger!

How appropriate therefore that his assignment 19 years ago as cinematographer on Pierre Hoffman's epic documentary on China (then still one of the world's unknown places) should lead to this delightful book—his photographer's eye illuminating every page—even though, sadly and inexplicably, it has no pictures.

Dreams of the Dragon's Children is an evocative travelogue of a three month journey through China. It is also a working account of filming one of the first foreign documentaries on China ever sanctioned by the Communist government. Somewhere along the line the book turns into a Hitchcock thriller; complete with mysterious Chinese beauties who appear and disappear, soft-handed villains who abscond with the expense money (living in 5-star comfort with their male lovers while the

film crew double up in freezing army barracks!), a succession of fat ladies who are both benefactors and ogresses, hair-raising drives in unsuitable vehicles (including a Red Army truck, a Chinese-made vintage motorcycle complete with sidecar, and an 18-seater bus with a sleeping driver!), enigmatic old professors released from 7 years of labour camp, daring leaps from balconies to evade the black uniformed watchdogs who follow every move, and, finally, a dastardly plot by the Chinese Government (that keeps one guessing till the gripping last page denouement) to hijack and confiscate their film.

Navroze is good at describing people; etching in little details that bring his cast of characters vividly to life: The three gawky, contentious Beijing University students, euphonicly named Chang, Wang and Yang, who are the film's protagonists; Ning Ying, the Europe-returned woman director, touchy and emotional, her "tight Levis tucked inside knee-high ultra-polished Italian boots", and Jai Ming, the sound man who becomes her lover, (forgetting in the process to fill in those vital daily continuity sheets!). The pages teem with lovely cameos—smiley village children, their pant seams unstitched to squat and pee without staining their clothes, a snake restaurant where a cycle mechanic alternates as butcher-cum-chef, women welders on a building site wearing lipstick and heels with their overalls, the enormous woman capo at Chungking railways station, seated at her desk, having her nails manicured by her two assistants, "hands apart like she was flying". Even Mr. How, a villain clone out of James Bond, comes alive: practising martial arts in the park—"his controlled violence transformed into graceful Tai Chi movements". Little Li in May Ying village, with his triumphant grin and circled thumb gesture as he masters the zips on Navroze's bags and promptly appoints himself honorary camera assistant, is my especial favourite. I too had tears in my eyes when the time came to say goodbye.

The book is alternately moving, insightful, thrilling, and fun – lubricated with copious helpings of Captain Morgan rum! Without being preachy, it also gives one a sensitive overview of contemporary Chinese history – a China in transition from the repressive austerity of Mao to the liberalized Coca Cola culture of Deng Xiaoping. "Coca Cola is phallic symbol of the West fucking the East", says one disgruntled student, "In every picture it is



either standing up or in some girl's mouth." "No one can fuck China, not even Coca Cola", retorts another.

Navroze grew up a passionate admirer of Mao, carrying his *Little Red Book* in his jeans through the 60s. He collects Mao stories; noting the cult following he still has a decade after his death, and the huge strides China made under his pragmatic, wise, albeit authoritarian leadership. Inevitably, he contrasts it with India—a vibrant democracy, but with our villages still drought-ridden, illiterate and starving. (Ironically, the repressive Chinese Government sanctioned the making of this film, the supposedly liberal, open Indian Government refused Hoffman permission to shoot in India.) In three months travelling unrestrictedly all over urban and rural China,

the film crew "saw no poverty... like you see in India. No one seemed hungry, no one seemed unwell." Everyone was comfortably if drably dressed. There were village schools, clinics, and public toilets even in the remotest interior villages.

But Navroze is objective too about the sacrifices the Chinese people made for this progress – the loss of personal freedoms, the victimization of the middle class, the ruthless stamping out of religion, the imposition of the one child rule, in constant fear of being picked up by Government goons for a casual remark. Summary trial and death for petty crimes like profiteering or un-ticketed travel, the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and Gang of Four.... 2000 people executed in Beijing alone in the previous 6 years.

Though Tiananmen Square was still four years in the future, Navroze personally experiences some of the merciless rigour of a totalitarian state—humourless and unbending—on several occasions. Picking up a hotel towel as a souvenir, going off sightseeing without permission, are offences that almost land him in jail. He never did find out what happened to that luckless Vietnamese waitress who first befriended them. Creepy too, is that story of how he thinks he's the first Indian to ever visit Inner Mongolia, only to be cheerily told that the previous one, a South Indian priest, was flung off a cliff for proselytizing.

I loved *Dreams of the Dragon's Children*, and learnt a lot from it. I did miss, not just his photographs, but other traces of the Navroze I knew—his wacky imagery, wonderful spellings, and unconventional use of language. Were they in the first draft that went missing in the Bombay newspaper office? They all seem to have been cleaned up in this edition. (I can't imagine him saying "relieved myself" when he means "peeing"). I wished too for more details of his life – other films and travels, his working philosophy, some account of the family he left behind in India and misses so intensely. The best travel books are also autobiography. And whatever happened to Pierre Hoffman – the director/producer? He is the one person, inscrutably there on almost every page, who never comes alive, although he was responsible for starting it all. We are left 257 pages later, not even knowing what he looks like!

Other mysteries are an Epilogue that repeats in short form what the last three pages of the book have already told us, and a cryptic quote from Alfred Hitchcock that is positively Zeno-like – "God makes feature films but documentaries are made by God." Is the first God a misprint for Man, or was Alfred Hitchcock really Confucius? Navroze, please write us another gorgeous book to explain!

Laila Tyabji is Chairperson of Dastakar, a society for crafts and craftspersons in New Delhi.

Communication

In response to Professor Sunita Zaidi's review of my book *State Formation in Rajasthan: Mewar during the Seventh-Fifteenth Centuries* (Manohar, 2002) in *The Book Review*, Vol. XXVII NO. 3, I would like to clarify the following points.

This monograph focuses on a transitional period going beyond the conventional periodization of Indian history into early medieval and medieval. The importance of the transitional period in the study of the processes of state formation has been highlighted on page 18. I am thankful to Zaidi for appreciating the research on integrative processes of state formation in Mewar.

However, Zaidi being a historian of medieval India has missed out on my study of the Puranic section of the Ekalingamahatmya Sisodia for the first time, as the place of origin for the Rana branch distinct from the former Guhilas, the Ravals (see pp. 249-250). This section, believed to have been composed immediately after the period under study, introduced new royal motifs.

I have quoted Elliot and Dowson as an additional reference only twice throughout my monograph (p.151, endnote 267 and 268. These are long notes which mentions "also see Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III"). While Rizvi's translations of Persian sources are important, it seems to be a bias to dismiss and generalize that Elliot and Dowson's account is 'full of discrepancy'.

Nainsi's *Marwar be Pargana a be Vigat* is an important seventeenth century source but not

essential for a study of Mewar. The relationship between the state and its personnel and particularly the relationship with the Guhila kinsmen and non-Guhila Rajputs have been discussed on the basis of contemporary sources. Neither the phrase Bhai-banth nor Chakri or Patta figure in the sources under study. Unlike Marwar, Mewar was not conquered by the Guhilas and their kinsmen. Hence, we have no evidence of Mewar being parcelled out among the kinsmen and hence, the state was not based on bhai-banth relationship. Different chapters and sections have dealt with social, political, administrative and military linkages of the Guhila dynasty with non-Guhila Rajputs and non-Rajput social groups.

Zaidi has failed to appreciate my methodology of studying the social origin of the Guhilas. The author having referred to B.D. Chattopadhyaya's article, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan', has made a chronological analysis of the origin-claims made by the Guhila dynasty of Mewar between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries. We no longer believe in fixing the social origins of the different Rajput dynasties. If we do so, then this research is not different from those of Dasharath Sharma or J.N. Asopa. The Guhilas claimed different origins in different points of time along with growth in their political career.

Zaidi has confused the process of integration of local goddesses including that of the Bhils and cults of Shiva into a regional pantheon led by Ekalingaji with different deities of different Bhil

clans. I have not generalized that the Bhomar rights rested with the Bhils but simply mentioned an important geographical and cultural information that the Bhil-occupied territory of Mewar hills are popularly known as Bhomar.

I have enumerated the functions of officials like the Pradhana, Mahamatya and Mukhyamantri on the basis of the contemporary sources in chapter 4. Zaidi seems to have missed out the discussion on the functions of a Pradhana and his distinction with a mahamatya.

Finally, but not the least, I have discussed a detailed historiographical debate on the study of the state between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries in chapter one. I differ from the reviewer that I am silent about the nature of the Guhila state. I have attempted to show that processes of incorporation, accommodation and delegation of royal power brought about the consolidation of the state power/central power represented by the Guhila dynasty and not through centralization or decentralization of state power. And that's why the state paid so much of importance to legitimation of royal power to legitimize its exercise of royal authority. Hence, I do not follow the models of 'centralization' or 'decentralization'. The Guhila state of Mewar, when studied from the angle of state formation appears to be integrative. The study of the phenomenon of regional state formation needs to find its place in the current historiography on the study of state in pre-colonial India.

Nandini Sinha Kapur

If it is unusual for authors to respond to reviews of their books, it is even more unusual for translators to do so. The presumption, therefore, must be that if I have chosen to do so, that too amidst a great many other preoccupations, I have been substantially provoked, albeit not so much by the reviews themselves as by the reviewers' attitudes to a totem from the past. This letter is more about that than the contents of the reviews.

Nearly three years ago, I reviewed the memoirs of Dr. P.N. Dhar who had served in the Prime Minister's Secretariat (as it was known then) when Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister. Dr Dhar had worked for Mrs Gandhi through the turbulent years from 1970 to 1977. It was therefore widely expected that his memoirs would throw some inextinguishable light on what had gone on at the highest levels of government during that period and thereby improve our understanding of not just history but also of one of its very important figures and her style of governance.

But that expectation was belied. Although reviews of the book were generally couched in the superlative terms that are reserved for the venerable in India, in private conversations most people who had actually read the book confessed to being disappointed. In my review I said that this reticence on the part of Dr. Dhar did not serve the larger national purpose. I also wished that more senior civil servants would write their memoirs on a more regular basis. In that context, I wrote that B.N. Tandon had served in the Prime Minister's Secretariat at the time and his term there had been almost co-terminous with that of Dr. Dhar. I wondered if Mr Tandon, a family friend of long standing, would ever write his memoirs.

A friend of Mr. Tandon's read that review and sent it along to him. A few days later, Mr. Tandon asked me to come and see him. He showed me a huge stack of hand-written diaries in Hindi and said that he had indeed maintained a record, that too a daily one, of the months between November 1974 and July 1976. He also said that he was planning to publish their contents in Hindi. I suggested that he should also publish an English translation and offered to do it. Aware that almost my entire schooling had been in Hindi, he agreed. The first volume was published last November.

In due course, a number of reviews appeared. Soon after the one in *The Hindustan Times* was published, R.K. Dhawan wrote to the paper seeking to devalue the book by suggesting that Mr Tandon had sought Indira Gandhi's patronage after she came back to power in 1980. He published a letter in which Mr. Tandon asked that he be treated fairly. What he did not mention was that this letter was the consequence of a verbal instruction from Mrs. Gandhi to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh that Mr. Tandon should not be promoted. Mrs. Gandhi ignored the letter and, in consequence, he resigned from the IAS in 1983. It was subsequently put about that Mrs. Gandhi was "unhappy" with Mr. Tandon because he had RSS "leanings". This at a time when Mrs. Gandhi had herself started down the path that led to her famous "Jammu speech" in 1983.

While I could understand R.K. Dhawan's response to Mr Tandon's diaries, I could not understand the response of many of the reviewers. Most of them said that while Indira Gandhi was indeed responsible for many evils that still beset the country, and that the diary was indeed a valuable contribution to history as it provided a contemporary account of it, Mr Tandon should have resigned if he had been so unhappy about them. There was also an underlying sub-text that someone so lowly should not have had the temerity to cast aspersions on someone as great as Mrs Gandhi. There was, in a sense, the disdain that is seen for a butler's revelations about his master, quite unmindful of the fact that "no man is a hero to his valet". One reviewer even accused him of having a moral and idealistic vision of things. Another said there was no tittle-tattle in it, which was good — and then went on to say a few paragraphs later that this made it boring.

There was also, at least in my view, annoyance amongst such reviewers. Why, I cannot understand. At the fact he had maintained a diary? But that was his personal right. That he decided to publish it? That serves a larger cause. With the language he used? But it was a personal memoir. With the translation? If so, my apologies. In fact, one reviewer did say that the translation was poor, though how he could have known without having seen the original material beats me.

One suspicion I have is that only one or two of the reviewers actually read the whole book. I cannot blame the rest because it is a rather large book and ought to have been shorter. But if they did not have the patience to read it all, they should not have reviewed it either, because there are, I promise you, nuggets there that throw the sharpest relief possible on the manner in which Indira Gandhi ran India and on the manner in which she eventually ruined governance in our country. I found no mention of any of these in any of the reviews.

There is also the larger issue of the barely concealed sympathy for Mrs Gandhi. In some respects this is understandable. Some, at least, of the reviewers had been her hangers-on. Others had and have Congress connections of one sort or another. One or two are just curmudgeonly and a few were merely inconsistent in the way people are when they are forced to take clear positions on someone who towered as massively over the country as Mrs Gandhi did. But except from the hangers-on, that still does not explain the annoyance and the irritation.

Is it simply that we have become so accustomed to hagiographies (and they abound) that we cannot accept a different view? Recall, in this context, the response to all the accounts of the Gandhi family that have sought not to hide the uncomfortable details. How dare you, is the underlying sentiment and usually the writers have been accused of dark motives. Few have asked the all-important question, is what the writer saying true? Is it consistent with the versions that others have provided of the same event?

I hold no brief for Mr Tandon. I merely translated his diary and as such am able to maintain a distance. I will receive some royalties but that is all. Even so I cannot help wondering at the attitude of some of our intellectual glitterati to inconvenient versions of the life and style of the Gandhi family, especially Indira Gandhi who, in my view (and her father's) was wholly unfit to rule over our country and who, therefore, ruined it with her self-advancing policies.

Mr Tandon's diary shows how. What is wrong with that?

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan

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new in translations...



The Sound of the Kiss or The Story That Must Never Be Told

Kalapurnodayamu
Pingali Suranna
Translated from Telugu by
Velcheru Narayana Rao and
David Shulman

Composed in the mid-sixteenth century, Pingali Suranna's Telugu novel, the *Kalapurnodayamu* (The Sound of the Kiss, or The Story That Must Never Be Told), could be considered the first novel written in South Asia. Suranna's masterpiece comes from a period of intense creativity in Telugu, when great poets produced strikingly modern innovations. The novel explodes preconceived ideas about early South Indian literature: for example, that the characters lack interiority, that the language is formulaic, and that Telugu texts are mere translations of earlier Sanskrit works.

Employing the poetic style known as *campu*, which mixes verse and prose, Pingali Suranna's work transcends our notions of traditional narrative. "I wanted to have the structure of a complex narrative no one had ever known," he said of his great novel, "with rich evocations of erotic love, and also descriptions of gods and temples that would be a joy to listen to."

The Sound of the Kiss is both a gripping love story, a complex religious allegory, and a profound meditation on mind and language. Shulman and Rao include a thorough introduction that provides a broader understanding of, and appreciation for, the

complexities and subtleties of this text.

This magnificent novel is hard to put down, and will appeal to anyone interested in classical Indian literature.
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Selected Poems of Buddhadeva Bose

Ketaki Kushari Dyson

Buddhadeva Bose (1907–74) is now being recognized as one of the most multitalented amongst the post-Tagore generation of Bengali writers.

A versatile writer—comfortable in genres as diverse as poetry, novels, short stories, drama, essays, travelogues, and memoirs—he was also an influential editor and critic, a translator of poetry who had a profound impact on younger poets, a writer for children, and a pioneer in comparative literary studies. He set up the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and held visiting appointments at several American campuses.

Bose came into prominence in the thirties, when he founded the poetry quarterly *Kavita*, which he edited for a quarter-century. *Kavita* became the leading Bengali poetry magazine of its time and was also an important vehicle for the discussion and review of poetry. Tied to the magazine was its own publishing house, *Kavitabhavan* (The House of Poetry), both run from the poet's home. The apartment in southern Calcutta where he

lived and from which he carried on all his literary activities became an institution in the city's arts world. His magazine and publishing outlet made Bose a central figure among the cluster of poets who came to embody Bengali modernism. He richly deserves to be known as a major poet of twentieth-century India.

A substantial selection of his poems is presented here in English translation, with the necessary critical apparatus, by Ketaki Kushari Dyson, who is herself a well-established bilingual poet.

This volume is a must for libraries, academic institutions, and individuals interested in Indian literature in translation.



Twentieth Century Telugu Poetry

An Anthology
edited and translated by
Velcheru Narayana Rao

Masterfully translated, with sensitivity to each poem's tone and texture, this anthology presents the best poetry written in Telugu over the last one hundred years.

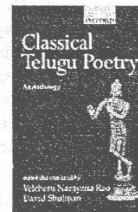
Full of rewarding surprises, deep meditations, high lyricism, and personal and political voices, these works unfold a vast and unknown territory, while remaining strangely familiar. Rooted in the long and vibrant Telugu literary tradition, originally intended for a specific group at a specific time, these poems are refreshingly universal—taking their rightful place in the timeless and boundless tradition of all great poetry.

Critical and biographical notes establish the contexts of the poems and give the reader

a window into the lives of the poets. The Afterword presents an analytical overview of the dynamic story of twentieth century Telugu poetry.

A companion volume, *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*, edited and translated by Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, covers the pre-modern period. Together, the two anthologies make accessible to the world for the first time a thousand years of the great literary tradition of the Telugu-speaking people of south India.

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Classical Telugu Poetry

An Anthology
edited and translated by
Velcheru Narayana Rao and
David Shulman

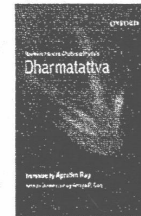
The classical tradition in Telugu is one of the richest, most original, and least explored of all South Asian literatures. This anthology—the first of its kind—opens a window to a thousand years of poetry in Telugu.

Each of the major poets is represented in this anthology by a substantial selection. The poetry is often startling in its freshness, individuality and depth. The anthology ranges from the epic narrative poetry of Nannaya and Tikkana to the personal lyrics of Annamayya and Dhurja...i. In the introductory essay, the authors provide readers with an understanding of the evolving structure and innovations of this tradition from its beginnings in the eleventh century up to the twentieth century.

Compiled by two well-

known scholars, this anthology will help bring the world of Telugu poetry to a wider audience of aficionados, connoisseurs, and scholars.

A companion volume, *Twentieth Century Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* by V. Narayana Rao, covers the modern period.
0195653009 2002
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Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Dharmatattva

translated by Apratim Ray
with an introduction by Amiya P. Sen

Dharmatattva is Bankimchandra's 'final manifesto' on religious and ethical ideals in the context of what are considered the essential truths of Hinduism.

Although the work first appeared as a series of separate articles in a Bengali periodical published from Kolkata, Bankimchandra compiled these in 1888 into *Dharmatattva* in its present form. It is generally regarded as an important document in the development of Bankimchandra's ideas and in the history of Indian philosophy. In it, the author rationalizes Hindu thought and practice as influenced by the Utilitarian and Positivist philosophies of nineteenth-century Europe.

Apratim Ray's translation is careful and accurate, and Amiya P. Sen's substantive introduction outlines the general context of thought and ideas in which *Dharmatattva* was written and understood both then and today.

0195656113 2003
215 x 140 mm 268 pp. Rs 595

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ISBN 0195656113