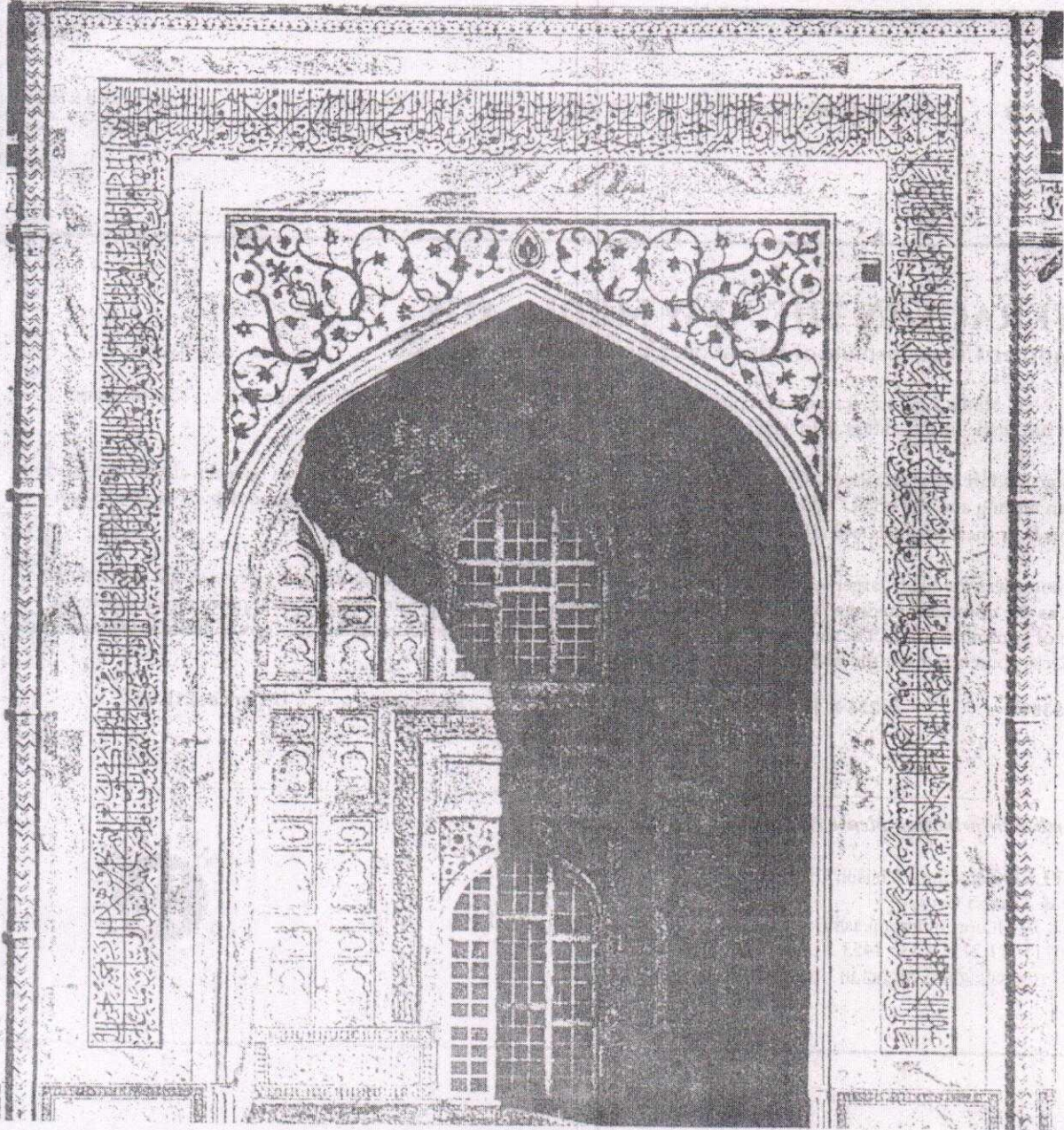


THE BOOK REVIEW

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Modernist Architectural Ideology

Snehanshu Mukherjee

THE LONELINESS OF A LONG DISTANT FUTURE: DILEMMAS OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

By Romi Khosla

Tulika, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 252, Rs. 750.00

A CONCISE HISTORY OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA

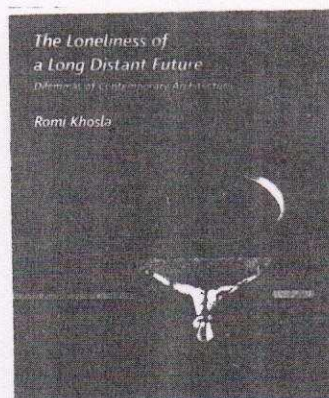
By Jon Lang

Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002, pp. 205, Rs. 975.00

A MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURE

By Gautam Bhatia

Tulika, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 167, Rs. 400.00



One can safely assume that the authors of the three books on architecture that are under review, did not write them in consultation with each other. However there are some interesting comparative similarities between them which reflect contemporary concerns. The books by Romi Khosla and Gautam Bhatia are both personal viewpoints towards issues in architecture. While Khosla's book presents remarkable analytical viewpoints to a variety of known situations, like the Aga Khan Awards in Architecture and the Arab Israel conflict, Bhatia's is an intense and a somewhat narcissistic, free wheeling text about his perception and experience of architecture. Jon Lang's book is different from the other two in its stated objective of being a documentation of the making of contemporary architecture in India. In effect Lang plays down his own viewpoint on the works of individual architects and instead creates a framework to categorize them. Interestingly, among the various projects listed in the book, are also those of the authors of the other two books reviewed here.

Khosla's book is a collection of two introductions and six essays of which four have been previously published. Of the two introductions, the one by the author is the actual introduction to the volume, while the second one by the economist Prabhat Patnaik is more of an essay analysing the text and therefore in this reviewer's opinion, is best read as a postscript.

The substance of the book could be split into six separate chapters which reflect the six sub-concerns of the author that together form the central theme discussed by Khosla. The book's context is architecture in the sociopolitical scenario of today's world—the rapidly changing technological and economic conditions, ranging from the economically affluent West to the constant turmoil of Palestine—and the search for a cultural identity of nations that stretch across Eastern Europe through the Middle East to South-East Asia. The author focusing on what he terms the “non-Judaean-Christian world” analyses the conditions from the ideological standpoint of Modernist Architecture. One of the themes that runs through the different chapters is the

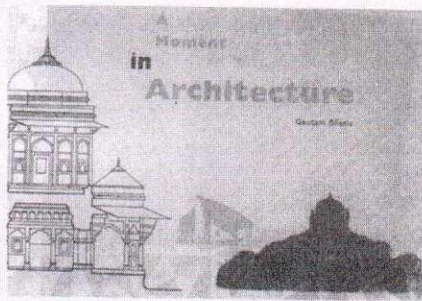
current domination of the “West” through globalization, and the resultant situation of the affected countries seeking self identity by “a reversal of Modernism” (or Modernist ideals). An extended issue is the conflict between societies that believe in the modernist agenda, and those who shield themselves from the modern, which according to the author creates a duality of “irreconcilable differences”.

As an analytical framework, Khosla uses the ideologies of the Modernist Movement in architecture that have addressed issues of social relevance rather than those that limit arguments to merely a question of style. The Modernist Style, Khosla concedes has been taken over by the corporates of the capitalist world. He discusses the western domination of the world through economic means as well as the media, by citing examples that range from the design of museum displays to the lesser known aspects of the Israel and Palestine conflict. The first five chapters analyse different situations in a John Berger-esque manner which are quite successful in making the reader see well known situations from a completely different viewpoint. The display of artefacts in a museum, stripped off their cultural and physical context, converting them into commodities, is one such example. The fabrication of history by the Israeli government authorities, by creating grand images of the Second Herodian Temple—when archaeological remains from the site do not support such a reconstruction in any way—is another example. Such examples are only too familiar here in India as well, and the author draws attention to its parallels with the Ayodhya Ram Mandir controversy. In the last chapter, Khosla puts the Israel-Palestine conflict into the context of control of resources as well as control through architecture and planning. The author's suggested solution to the conflict is an architectural one, that of building the Jerusalem Train Station—the final stand in a classic Modernist architectural response.

Such a stand brings back the old debate, can architecture solve or change social and political problems or does architecture simply reflect current conditions? The architecture of low income mass-housing as an instrument of

social change is one such debate. The dynamism of the Pruitt-Igoe Social Housing Project in Missouri, USA during the 60s still remains a powerful image of the failure of modernist architecture as a means of social and economic change. Khosla's proposal of the Jerusalem Rail Station might work but only if political conditions allow such a project to be accepted, after which would come the task of determining the architecture of the station. What then, would be the appropriate architectural response to the context of the project? The images generated by Khosla of the station are conceptual strongly reminiscent of the Spanish architect Enric Miralles' design competition entry for the Scottish Parliament. Architecturally therefore, the station building appears to be non-conventional, and could probably be labelled as “futuristic” very similar to the current western stylistic trend, typified by the media hyped Bilbao museum of Frank Gehry. The similarity in the approach of these two projects—in creating a building that does not resemble one—ends the book with an architectural work which though conceptual in its presentation, commits to a sort of architecture which follows the current western trend, one that the author has criticized in the same book. It perhaps illustrates the dilemma faced by the “Modernist” architect today, which comes through in both Lang's and Bhatia's books as well, tying them together with Khosla's work through a common thread.

Jon Lang's book is a categorization and source book of contemporary Indian architecture. The book is similar to his earlier book *Architecture & Independence, The Search For Identity - India 1880 -1980*, co-authored with Madhavi and Mikki Desai. However, in this book, Lang concentrates specifically on the years between 1920 and 2000. The book creates a framework that puts in place different trends in the development of architecture in India, and in the process seeks to find a discernible pattern. There is a wealth of cross-referenced and authenticated information about different buildings and their architects, with an exhaustive bibliography that links the information to their sources. This by itself makes the book a valuable addition to the



limited books published on contemporary Indian architecture. The author in his preface also states that "[t]he book has been written with Indian architectural students in mind and focuses on describing the variety of ideas shaping architecture in India." This quote summarizes the intention of the book most economically and succinctly.

In the same preface Lang has written "while I am critical of much Modernist and Post-Modernist architecture I believe that 'the Modernists almost got it right' and recognize that all buildings are designed within an economic and political context." Here again is the same theme as Khosla's book, of using the referential framework of Modernism as an architectural ideology. Lang uses this framework to evaluate the different stages of contemporary Indian architecture since 1920. Here, in Lang's book one finds a definition of Modernism, which helps to clarify the background reference of all three books under review. Quotes from Lang's book therefore help to establish the essence of Modernist architectural ideology. Lang states that, "[w]esternisation is often considered a synonym for modernisation,..." and "[i]n architecture, a modernist is often considered to be somebody who simply supports any break with the past. Often it is a person who advocates a new look for buildings—a new style.... More broadly, a modernist architect believes that architecture is a medium for improving the lives of people." Here, Lang has recorded the common belief that a lot of architects, trained under the Modernist school of thought, still share (a proof of this has been presented above in the review of Khosla's book). Lang goes on to state that "[w]hat has to be avoided when thinking in this manner is the belief that the built environment can determine people's behaviour. The built environment can only provide behavioural and aesthetic affordances, or opportunities." Architecture in India today, has wound itself from the Modernist and Post-Modernist phases to a period of multiplicity and contradictions. Contradictions existed in the early Modernist period as well, especially when compared with the works of indigenous and vernacular architects and builders. During this phase the formally trained architects practised undiluted Modernism almost uniformly. Today the compartments no longer

exist even within formally trained architects. Therefore Lang's classification includes "Purist Modernist Architecture", "Utilitarian Modernist", "Neo-Modernist", "Architecture as an Art Form, as Sculpture", "Neo-Traditional Architecture", "Deconstruction", "Modern Indian Vernacular", "Community Architecture" and "Preservation and Conservation".

The time frames that Lang uses in his book to classify the different developments also show the complexity of the situation. Different trends in architectural development do not follow a linear progression from one to the other but overlap certain periods or co-exist with the different, often contradictory architectural ideologies. The chapters are written based on years that overlap and also move back and forth, for example, while Chapter 3 is from 1945 to 1970, Chapter 4 is from 1950 to 1980, Chapter 5 moves from 1965 to 1990. The overlaps in the years cover the various co-existent approaches to architecture that continue to exist in this manner. Lang in his categorization establishes a wide variety of approaches to designing within the ambit of formal architectural works alone.

Despite these various design approaches, Modernism is an important referential standpoint and cannot be wished away. Till today, it continues to be taught in all schools of architecture in the country. As Lang says "the Modernists almost got it right", and their logical approach to design is difficult to argue against. However, since clients are not indoctrinated in the same way as architects, variations or departures from modernism are commonly resorted to by a large number of trained architects, while the vernacular builders carry on regardless of any modernist conventions. Nonetheless the confusion arising out of the Modernist indoctrination persists amongst most thinking architects. Therefore if Khosla discusses the phenomenon of "Countermodernism" by using examples such as "A modern Soviet-designed building is resurfaced with brick and arches to reflect the newfound Uzbek identity", it is the Modernist viewpoint which disallows us from accepting and therefore addressing the reality effectively.

This confusion is best understood in the last and third book under review, by the author/architect Gautam Bhatia. Bhatia, many years ago, had addressed the same confusion in architecture, when the bulk of new constructions, largely under government patronage, was dominated by Modernist designs. The hybrid, pastiche architecture that is common today, had started mushrooming at that time in the newly developed posh colonies of Delhi. It was at this point that Gautam Bhatia had written a feature in *The Indian Express*, where he had done a tongue-in-cheek categorization of the newly emerging trends in house facades. By now his labels, such as "Marwari Mannerism" and "Punjabi Baroque" have become

common parlance amongst architects and others who have read the books that Bhatia wrote subsequently. The book under review is a very personal account of architecture, which the author claims to be "impersonal". The author in his acknowledgements has stated, that he was inspired by several other books to present his thoughts in a "unstructured diary-like format".

The advantage of a personal account is that one does not need to reference the work or validate the arguments with extensive footnotes, that are a result of laborious research. However, books with an "unstructured diary-like format" have only worked in the case of acknowledged masters of architecture, where their random jottings provoke further thought for the reader. This happens because the notes in the diary are usually the writings of a thinker, and are part of a personal exploration to understand or rationalize some issue. Such writings are usually never intended by the author to be published, since they are mostly unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, since they are resultant of a process of informed thinking, they often compel the reader to think further. Gautam Bhatia's effort does not seem to fall into the category of informed notes, but has become primarily a question of deliberate style or format. As a result, it becomes a sort of book that is difficult to agree or disagree with, unless one is in the same frame of mind as the author himself.

Bhatia's contention in the book is difficult to understand, though there are a few lucid, almost perceptive, passages. For the most part, the author strings together his own opinion based on architecture as an experience. At times the opinions are derived out of quotes of renowned architects like Louis I Kahn and Corbusier. Through the text, Bhatia uses evocative drawings that he has executed along with photographs of different buildings and their parts, often un-captioned, making their link with the text tenuous. The book, nonetheless, serves as a perfect example of the confusion over Modernism. This confusion, is perhaps most illuminatingly summarized in Bhatia's starting and ending sentences. The book begins with, "I love architecture. I am drawn to architecture in the way a doctor is instinctively moved to the act of healing..." and culminates in an end which confesses that, "Even before I began to write this book, I thought I had a clear idea of architecture. It was an abstract notion and one that was extracted from history books, travel and professional experiences. Architecture has the backing of history, the support of whole movements. From my own professional background I had assumed it to be a carrier of some unquestionable, eternally valid truth. Now I am not so sure."

Bhatia has been very truthful in stating, rather bluntly, the dilemma that forms part of

the title of Khosla's book. He has questioned his own understanding of architecture without abandoning the purist Modernist standpoint, which today in this age of information is no longer sufficient to make sense of things, and thereby the unsureness that dominates the mind of the thinking architect.

To conclude, Modernist architectural thought and training are at crossroads. Each of the authors illustrate this in their own ways, just as it is visible in the vast medley of buildings that keep cropping up today in the large cities of the country and elsewhere in the world. Today we have hospitals that look like luxury hotels and multi-storey housing estates that look like an imitation baroque palace which has been stretched in all directions to achieve the desired size. The Modernist ideology and its referencing system is no longer able to provide the explanations or directions required for architects to base their work upon. The result is the confusion brought forward through the three books reviewed here. It is time now for more such books to be written, that seek to analyse and explain the architectural conditions of this age, and perhaps point to a way forward. ■

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

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Writing History

Amar Farooqui

HISTORY AND THE PRESENT

Edited by Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 273 + ix, Rs 575.00

Marx Bloch once stated that the history of a living social institution could only be understood if one had 'a sufficiently precise knowledge of that institution in its present state of continuous change'. Ever alert to the processes whereby the present can distort our knowledge of the past he also stressed that we should not impose upon the past 'opinions pillaged from imperfect descriptions of the present'. As a skilled practitioner of the historian's craft, and as an eventual victim of the fascist manipulation of history, Bloch knew what he was talking about. In the context of contemporary Indian politics the relationship between history and the present is not just an abstract theoretical issue. It impinges upon the daily lives of people, right from the victims of Gujarat riots to school students trying to make sense of the recent controversy over NCERT history textbooks.

The present volume contains nine essays by historians, anthropologists and political scientists on this theme. Earlier versions of these essays were initially presented and discussed at a conference organized by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, in 1999. It was around this time that the campaign for propagating a Hindutva version of history was becoming increasingly aggressive with the ascendancy of the Sangh Parivar to power and the political legitimacy that this gave to fascist-communal ideologies. Numerous references to these developments in almost all the essays indicate that the attempt to redefine India's past in order to implement an agenda in the present is what prompted the discussion. As such this is a book which addresses a problem of immediate concern, and in the process offers significant insights into the 'meaning of history'.

Partha Chatterjee's introduction is essentially a reappraisal of E.H. Carr's classic *What Is History?* This small book has nurtured an entire generation of historians. Carr's lucid enunciation of the subjectivity of the historian rendered the act of history-writing much more self-conscious. This subjectivity implied, Chatterjee notes, 'that we can understand the past only through the eyes of the present'. At the same time, we are reminded, Carr was not so naive as to argue 'that since everything was interpretation, one person's subjective understanding of the facts was as good as another's'.

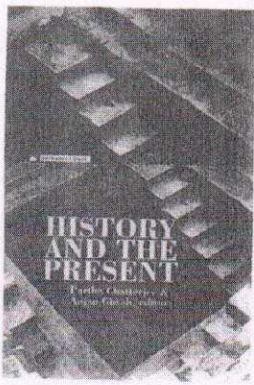
Whereas Carr was quite confident of the ability of history to exist as an independent discipline with its own methodology and of

the possibility of constituting 'facts', the postmodernist assault on history, whereby history has been reduced to being merely another form of narration, has somewhat shaken that confidence in recent years. Nevertheless there is a distinction between history-writing and fiction-writing and 'facts' are not as elusive as they might seem: 'Clearly, whatever else in scientific historiography may have come under a cloud, the technical apparatus of the verification and authorization of "facts" remains intact. At the very least, there is no doubt about the need for such a technical apparatus, even if the currently used one in any particular field is in dispute. Writing history has not become the same thing as writing fiction'.

Shahid Amin's essay, 'On Retelling the Muslim Conquest of Northern India', scrutinizes the politics of depicting the spread of Islam to India exclusively in terms of oppression of the Hindus as well as the kind of stereotyping that this involves. He outlines the emergence, since the second quarter of the twentieth century, of a consciously secular-national view on medieval India which highlighted 'the long trend of tolerance, mutual respect and crossings in India's national past'. Such a response, Amin feels, is inadequate because 'the focus on syncretism *sans* conflict amounts to taking only half a step'. Religious conflicts in the medieval period should not be glossed over leaving 'the field of sectarian strife as the special preserve of sectarian and "communal" historians'. What is required is a non-sectarian history of sectarian conflict.

Amin uses the legend of Syed Salar Masaud

In the context of contemporary Indian politics the relationship between history and the present is not just an abstract theoretical issue. It impinges upon the daily lives of people, right from the victims of Gujarat riots to school students trying to make sense of the recent controversy over NCERT history textbooks.



Ghazi (Ghazi Miyan) prevalent in the Bahraich area of eastern Uttar Pradesh to demonstrate how this could be done. The shrine of Ghazi Miyan, one of the many *mazars* of warrior saints/ghazis/shaheeds (several of whom are anonymous and are simply referred to as 'shaheed miyan' or 'ghazi miyan') which dot northern India, has been venerated by Muslims and local Hindus alike. This in itself is not an unusual phenomenon, except that Salar Masaud is supposed to have been a nephew of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Mahmud has all along been central to the Hindu communal conception of medieval India, combining in a single image prominent traits of the stereotyped cruel, violent, rapacious, bigoted and fanatical Muslim conqueror. As for Salar Masaud, he represents the typical holy warrior propagating Islam, fighting for the cause of his religion, and subjugating Hindu rajas. In the ballads about him he is also depicted as a protector of cows, something which endears him to Ahir cowherds. In its popular narration the legend thus manages to incorporate within a story of religious conflict such elements as can form the basis of syncretism.

A word of caution is necessary here. Sectarian histories of religious conflict will ever remain the staple of communal historians. It is integral to their project. Non-sectarian histories of sectarian conflict, as long as they speak of conflict, can be easily appropriated and accommodated as elements within a communal discourse. Communalization is at the same time vulgarization. If subtle nuances brought out by non-sectarian interpretations do not make much headway outside the rarefied atmosphere of academic institutions these may be susceptible to vulgarization. This is not to suggest that such a project should not be undertaken, but only that sectarian histories of religious conflict cannot be confronted merely through non-sectarian accounts. They have to be countered politically. Not surprisingly, early secular-nationalist historians were rather circumspect in dealing with this problem.

Deepak Mehta's essay 'Writing the Riot', takes us straight to the actual site of communal

strife, to record individual 'fragmented' experiences and collective memory of the violence of India's first large-scale post-partition anti-Muslim pogrom—the Mumbai massacres of 1992-93—which followed the demolition of the Babri mosque. He uses the notion of voice to disentangle the trauma of the individual from a narrative of the riot as an event. Voice is crucial to preserving individually experienced violence though in its recording it partakes of collective recollection with its share of stereotypes. Unfortunately Mehta's paper is so heavily overlaid with Foucauldian vocabulary that at times voice appears to be distant and experience loses its immediacy. Popular memory is the umbilical cord which ideologically connects the present to history. But popular memory is as much about imagination and culture as about history. Salvaging the historical moments which are inscribed in it involves interpretation, and decoding the symbols which constitute it. Sundar Kaali's 'Mythicising the White Man' investigates, in the light of Obeyesekere's work on the apotheosis of James Cook, the strange cult of Vellaikkaran ('white man'). Vellaikkaran is a deity worshipped in some Tamil Nadu villages situated close to Kanyakumari. The idols of this deity are placed in temples along with those of Siva, Sakti etc. Offerings to the deity include meat, bread and cigars. In the ballads about this deity, Vellaikkaran appears as a white man ruling from London who sails to India, is drowned through divine intervention, and is eventually granted the boon of being worshipped. Sundar Kaali admits that he has not been able to discover any real historical event which this tale might be attempting to recount. Yet in its essentials it is not entirely a fantastic account: this kind of a 'sacral drama of colonial contact' serves to incorporate the colonial thus 'rendering it de/revalued'.

Nandini Sundar probes 'histories' of a village in Bastar which are based on field-work undertaken in the best traditions of (old-fashioned?) anthropological studies of village communities. The inhabitants of various hamlets which comprise the large village of Kukanar narrate, for the benefit of Nandini Sundar, what they regard as history. These are partly mythical accounts of original settlement of the village which vary from hamlet to hamlet and among different groups within the hamlets. These are intimately bound up with present-day concerns, seeking to assert the superiority of certain groups/hamlets.

Indrani Chatterjee's essay examines the history of the *Rajamala*, an epic which purports to be the official dynastic chronicle of the rulers of Tripura. The publication towards the end of the nineteenth century of a history of Tripura written by an official of the Tripura raj, sparked off an animated debate (mostly in Bangla) about the authenticity or otherwise of the *Rajamala*. This history questioned the

One of the most fascinating essays in the book is by Tapati Guha-Thakurta who is well-known for her work on the place of museums in the colonial scheme of things.

genealogy contained in traditional *Rajamala* versions. Chatterjee shows how this questioning of the genealogy itself was the product of colonial legal classification which sought to designate certain forms of marriage as concubinage. The chronicle thus becomes a document for studying social history against the backdrop of Tripura's colonial encounter.

Two other essays have similar themes: Prathama Banerjee's discussion on Santal memories of rebellion in which different concepts of time are at work and critical events differ 'according to the critical moment of remembering'; and Reem Saad's paper on political memories and everyday life in an Egyptian village—the only essay which does not deal with India and is refreshing in that it probes the theme of book in relation to a region which is generally neglected in Indian writings.

One of the most fascinating essays in the book is by Tapati Guha-Thakurta who is well-known for her work on the place of museums in the colonial scheme of things. Here she looks at the modern history of the by now famous Didarganj Yakshi, the large polished sandstone sculpture depicting a woman (c. 3rd century BC). She traces the twentieth century career of this art object from its discovery near Patna in 1917 to its 'metamorphosis into a national artistic icon' by 1947 and the preeminent status it had acquired by the time the 'Festivals of India' were organized abroad during the 1980s. There is much that this career reveals about the relationship between the present and history. Guha-Thakurta explores the possession of the Yakshi by the colonial state; controversies surrounding its date, designation, label, display, and iconography; classification of similar other sculptures; location of the Yakshi in the history of Indian art; and the valuation of the Yakshi in monetary terms for purposes of insurance (at Rs 250 million) in the 1980s whereby its artistic worth was quantified. The Yakshi plays different roles in the various phases that mark its modern career, and each role is determined by what a particular 'present' wants the past to do. For, ultimately, the past is just what the present would like it to be. ■

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Defining Multiculturalism

A.R. Vasavi

MAPPING MULTICULTURALISM

Edited by Kushal Deb

Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2002, pp. 317, Rs. 550.00

In what was a strident and astute critique, the late Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant had co-authored a seminal article in which they took to task the academic doxa that has resulted from the world-wide acceptance of U.S academic jargon. Of the terms identified by them, multiculturalism was one. This book, that centres on and speaks in the grammar of the multiculturalism debate(s), may be assessed not only in terms of the relevance of the concept for India but also in its implications for our understanding of cultural impasses in our troubled and troubling times.

In an introductory essay that is too long and repetitious, the editor, Kushal Deb, identifies the key issues and theoretical perspectives which have largely informed the multiculturalism debates. Rajeev Bhargava argues for the relevance of the term multiculturalism for India and indicates the links between identity, culture and community which also constitute, what he terms, three moments in the dialectic of multiculturalism. While the essay raises and pinpoints several interesting issues, it also provides an unnecessary summary of Anthony Appiah's views on multiculturalism. This essay, as with the introductory essay, and four others draw on the works of Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, thereby making the reading a bit tedious. In a paper, which is closer to being a critical overview of the multiculturalism debate, Valerian Rodrigues indicts the debate for having overlooked the economic bases of multiculturalism. More pointedly, he notes the extent to which multiculturalism has gained strength at a time when globalization has reduced cultures to becoming "scarce-crow cultures and communities rather than the authentic ones" (p. 116).

In an inaccessible essay, Shasheej Hegde provides a normative and sociological appraisal of multiculturalism and locates pluralism as being different from multiculturalism. In addition to being dense, the essay places Zizek's critique of multi-culturalism in the footnotes (p.147) thereby obfuscating a pertinent point that multi-culturalism is "a patronizing Eurocentrist distance and or/ respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture". Like Rodrigues, Sarah Joseph critiques the exclusion of economic criteria in the definition and identification of multiculturalism, which according to her leads to neglecting the "problem of entrenched inequalities between individuals and groups" and endorsing the idea that the recognition of

culture is central. Joseph's essay is the only one to identify the extent to which multiculturalism, as a process and trend, is a "strategy" (p.168) in which marginalized groups seek recognition and access to rights. Carol Upadhyia provides a summative overview of the anthropology debates on multiculturalism. Noting the differences in the anthropological definitions of "culture" to that of the multiculturalism definitions of 'culture', Upadhyia details the anthropologists' critique of the use of a reified and essentialized notion of culture among the multiculturalists. Though her analysis of the history of the changing anthropological conceptions of culture are thorough, Upadhyia underestimates the value and contribution of Boas' definition of culture. In an excellent overview of the contexts in which religio-political tensions are produced, Achin Vanaik argues for differentiating between religious fundamentalism, religious nationalism and communalism. In what is a refreshing shift in the much-generalized perspective on the role of modernity, Vanaik argues against identifying modernity as the sole problem which leads to religious fundamentalism and provides a progressive perspective in which the need for strengthening and enhancing the secularization process is reiterated.

Donald Waterfall's essay is written in a lecture tone and details Canada's multiculturalism policy. In comparing Canada and the United States, he makes an interesting observation about the absence of a powerful national identity and yet the deep commitment to multicultural policy in Canada. Kaushal Deb provides a chronological historiography of nationalism and multiculturalism in Canada and notes the emphasis in Canada on constituting a "mosaic" rather than a "melting pot" model of multiculturalism. Focussing on the indigenous or native communities of Canada, Narendra Bokhare details their position in the nation and indicates the growth of the "politics of difference" in which the groups or communities seek recognition for their distinctness. Aloka Parasher-Sen's essay raises important questions about the understanding and documenting of cultural diversity in India. In arguing against the monolithic representations of Indian cultures, she notes the need to broaden this representation and "instead of emphasizing only on the spiritual and social essences of Indian civilization, both the political and economic agencies at work have also to be taken into cognizance [of] for understanding the patterns of cultural



integration on the one hand, and exclusion on the other" (p. 260).

With his interest in indigenous knowledge and practices, Jan Brouwer delineates the Indian perceptions of society and self and the imbrication of this in indigenous knowledge systems. He points to how such conceptions are sharply varied from that of the conception of the self and society in the modern nation state. Surender Jodhka writes about the historical roots of identity formation among the Sikhs and more especially of the epistemic shift from an open and plural sanatana episteme to that of the homogenous one of modern Sikhism.

These essays which note the possibilities and promises of multiculturalism overlook the fact that though multiculturalism was a dominant trend and lexicon in the United States, the withdrawal of affirmative action in the two states, California and Texas, indicate the limitations of the multiculturalism aura and speech. Such trends have implications for arguments that see the recognition of and rights to cultural forms as the end all of the rights of people. As several critics, including Zizek, have pointed out, multiculturalism and its accompanying noise are not guarantors of the range of other rights that all disadvantaged peoples must be assured of. As the new perspectives from African Americans, Native Americans, Dalits and other subordinated peoples indicate, culture and its accoutrements can be learnt at home, but, can the institutions of the state and economy provide those elements that can ensure the livelihood rights of all peoples? Or will culture be the new form in which the rights to shared resemblances will be denied and hence the subordinated groups will be left to eat culture? In the context of these trends and questions, there is need for academia to be cautious and note as Bourdieu and Wacquant warned, of internalizing a doxa, which has implications not merely for the understanding of cultures but the rights of people to live with and beyond their cultures. All in all, a mixed bag of a book which could have made for better and easier reading if the editor and the publishers had taken the trouble to have it professionally edited and proof-read. ■

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Articulating Social Reality

Ujjwal Kumar Singh

THE MULTICULTURAL PATH: ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN DEMOCRACY

By Gurpreet Mahajan

Sage Publications, 2002, pp.239, Rs.280.00

Over the last decade and more, multicultural theory has provided important analytical tools for interrogating liberal democratic thought and practice. In the process it has propelled the idea of equality into primacy, by lending it towards recognizing and understanding issues of diversity and discrimination—issues—that were never acknowledged as significant in the life and times of liberal democracies. Both as a descriptive articulation of social reality, and as an affirmation of democratic norms and values, multiculturalism opens up for contest, questions of citizenship and identity, which liberal theory had for long deemed as settled/resolved within the hegemonic processes of the nation state. In the process of dismantling the hegemonic frameworks that assumed this resolution, multiculturalism has invoked an understanding of social reality that establishes the analytical and political reach of the theory. At the same time, it has also unearthed dilemmas pointing at the difficulties of a theoretical navigation of the complexities of socio-political reality.

Gurpreet Mahajan explores the various strands in the idea of multiculturalism and the analytical framework they offer for understanding and correcting discrimination in democratic societies. While pointing out the significance of multi-culturalism for a democratic theory of citizenship, Mahajan systematically and logically strings together its various dimensions into a coherent and comprehensible theory. This alone would have qualified Mahajan's work as exceptional, for more often than not, the intensity of the ideas which multiculturalism cherishes, gets diffused owing to its seeming affinity with communitarianism and cultural pluralism. By coalescing together the core elements of multicultural theory, the author brings into sharper focus both the grounds they share, but more importantly, the specificity of multiculturalism and the manner in which the questions raised by it, has compelled the liberal-capitalist state and theory to respond to it.

But Mahajan is not concerned with merely identifying the core elements of multiculturalism, viz., equality and preservation of diversity, and the manner in which multicultural alternatives have pressed the goal of equality with diversity, or even the manner in which the modern liberal state has sought to create a meeting ground between cultural rights and individual through certain exemptions and special rights. She goes beyond these delineations to show how contradiction creeps into multiculturalism even as it tries to straddle the precarious balance between equality and difference. The author then moves further to show how this contradiction

makes fragile the grounds on which the aspiration for preservation of diversity rests, jeopardizing thereby the centrality accorded to equality. The need therefore is to heed to multicultural questions pertaining to discrimination and diversity, without sliding into a theoretical position that endorses watertight compartments found on notions of 'deep' diversity. It is here, in rethinking multiculturalism, with the promise of negotiation and dialogue among diverse cultures, within the framework of a larger shared horizon of values which are responsive to and reflective of the special needs of a specific cultural community, that the real contribution of the book lies.

While rethinking the multicultural path, Mahajan does not lose sight of the two main premises of multiculturalism viz., the identification of the liberal state as the context of cultural discrimination, and democratization based on equality of cultural communities in the public domain. The liberal nation-state by its emphasis on a homogenous public culture, privileges, legitimizes and universalizes the majoritarian way of life, excluding and marginalizing minority communities. The individual is conceived as an unencumbered self, compelled to dissociate/mask her ascriptive identities, in order to be included in the public domain, which is already marked by the majoritarian culture. Multiculturalism points out that the terms of this inclusion are unjust and work to the disadvantage of persons who do not belong to the majority community. Equality, under such circumstances is reduced to a travesty. Multiculturalism lays down that the cultural community constitutes the self in meaningful ways, and that dissociation from one's identity within the public domain which privileges one culture while denigrating others, dehumanizes the individual and deprives the political community of the enrichment which comes from sharing and learning from other cultures. It asks, therefore, that the rules for inclusion into the political community should be rethought so that discrimination towards disadvantaged cultures is eliminated. This rethinking requires bringing in a notion of equality that respects cultural difference, and preserves cultural diversity.

It is, however, on the latter point, viz., preservation of cultural diversity, that the author parts company with western multiculturalists. Questioning the privileging of preservation of cultural diversity within western discourses of multiculturalism, the author makes the argument that measures aimed at enhancing diversity and protecting minority cultures sanction existing practices and traditional structures of authority, and a right to preservation of culture have often been

resisted by those subordinated by this authority structure. In making this argument, however, Mahajan is not simply repeating what others and she herself have said elsewhere. She is in fact making a more significant argument that questions the appropriateness and efficacy of the goal of preserving/protecting minority cultures in countering policies of cultural homogenization. This argument is not based merely on a discomfort with the outcome of policies of preservation, viz., the sustaining of structures of authority within the cultural community that work to the detriment of its members. It emerges rather, from a more fundamental questioning of the association multiculturalists see, between the aspiration for a cultural identity—the need for valuing a commitment to certain shared values and goals—and the assertion of such an identity—with the demand for protection and preservation of identity.

Seeking to dispel the notion that the assertion of an identity means, not only the need for having an identity, but also the demand for measures to protect it, the author rightly points out that the failure to do so has distracted multiculturalists from their original premise of ending discrimination. They have ended up concentrating their energies instead on devising ways for the mere preservation of cultural diversity. Indeed, the path of achieving the end of discrimination is not merely different from that leading to the preservation of cultural diversity. The two are in fact divergent. While the latter requires the members of a cultural community to submerge themselves in the task of the survival and sustenance of the community, the former asks for choices, for the option to have an access to their culture. An enunciation of the pitfalls of a multicultural theory that latches itself onto the idea of preservation of the cultural community, and a preference for the notion of choices and options to members, leads the author to reconceptualize the notion of a cultural community itself. From a homogenous, discrete, ossified unit, the cultural community is rethought as a dynamic category founded on non-conformist membership. This notion of the community enables the author to retain the democratic ideal of a heterogenous political community, which acknowledges the existence of diversity, and eschews the politics of a common good.

Multicultural Path is a work of exceptional scholarship, primarily because it makes an intervention into a debate that has often prompted unabashed essentialization of identities, or conversely, a celebration of the liberatory potential of unbridled heterogeneity. Recognizing that the cultural community is as dynamic as the socio-political contexts it occupies, the book calls for rethinking multiculturalism in a way that this dynamism is recognized as having value for the members of the community, as well as for opening up the heterogenous spaces of democracy.■

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Cooperative Production of Knowledge

Carol Upadhyia

THE VOICE AND THE WILL; SUBALTERN AGENCY: FORMS AND MOTIVES

By Guy Poitevin

Manohar & Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 393, Rs 775.00

Guy Poitevin set up the Centre for Cooperative Research in Social Sciences at Pune in 1982, dedicated to 'action research' focusing on marginalized groups and grassroots social movements. The six studies collected in this volume, carried out by the Centre over the last decade, are bound together by a concern to elucidate the question of 'subaltern' consciousness and agency. As Poitevin puts it, these studies provide a lens through which to theorize about "subaltern consciousness at the moment when hitherto subdued, silenced and subordinated individuals make attempts to rid themselves of the yoke fastened to their neck since birth by social orders" (p. 15).

The structure of the book reflects the author's theory of movement from subordination to change in consciousness to resistance. Framed by theoretical and methodological discussions in the Introduction and Conclusion, the studies are organized into three parts, entitled 'Cognition', 'Assertion', and 'Action'. The first section, also titled 'Reflexive Autonomy', analyses certain oral and ritual traditions of women in rural Maharashtra (the songs sung by women while grinding grain, and practices and beliefs related to fasting) with a view to revealing forms of subaltern consciousness and the growth of critical understanding. The second section, 'Assertion' or 'Narrative Identification', draws on autobiographical writings of a male agricultural labourer, Kalu, who recounted his troubled life to a 'social animator', and of two 'Untouchable' women, Shantabai Kamble and Baby Kamble, to understand how narrative is used to construct the self and reconstruct the large world as critical awareness develops. Moving to the realm of 'action', the third section (also 'Discourses of Interpretation'), includes two case studies of social action, one of women

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coolies in a Pune market and the other of rural women health workers. These substantive chapters offer ethnographic and cultural descriptions of the social situation and changing consciousness of subaltern subjects, from which the author attempts to draw theoretical insights. Although much of the description is compelling, especially the narratives by dalit women, the connections between the ethnographic data, their interpretation, and the theoretical frame are not always very clear.

In his choice of theme, Poitevin is diving into a very slippery can of worms that has been opened many times by diverse social theorists, but never successfully closed. He chooses to pin his discussion mainly on the work of Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies group, neglecting not only the critiques that have been made of the category of 'subaltern' and its attendant notion of 'resistance', but also a much longer history of theorizing on the question of agency (including from feminist perspectives) that might have helped him to untangle some of the questions he raises. In his search for 'counter-agency', for instance, he tends to equate resistance with agency itself and with the emergence of the subaltern as 'subject': "Our inquiry seeks the long and underground march of the deprived, the powerless and the subordinate to constitute themselves as human subjects through various forms of everyday resistance before they generate organized socio-political movements" (p. 20). Here Poitevin appears to suggest that the subordinated become social agents only at the moment of resistance, as if the reproduction of subordination and hegemony do not also depend upon the 'agency' of the subordinated. His definition of the 'subject' is equally fraught with problems: "By subject we understand a capacity to distance oneself from established practices, ideological consensus and normative behavioural constraints. We identify the subject as an instance of free judgment, as an assertive drive and as a pole of autonomous agency" (p.34). Does it need to be pointed out that this idea of the 'autonomous' and 'free' individual subject is an ideological construct that has been extensively deconstructed in recent years and does not provide a very attractive basis for understanding either social action or subjectivity?

The theoretical weaknesses of this book become evident in the analysis of the case studies. In the chapter on women's grinding



songs, for instance, Poitevin suggests that women use the story of Sita as an idiom to understand and project their own situation and experiences. While the material presented is evocative and demonstrates clearly how oral traditions are continually improvised and adapted to individual needs, the analysis of women's subjectivity here lacks the subtlety and theoretical sophistication found in similar ethnographic studies such as *Listen to the Heron's Words* (Raheja and Gold 1994). Similarly, the discussion of fasting interprets this complex cultural-religious practice in terms of a rather mechanical theory of female subordination to men, family and tradition. Poitevin's conclusion that "the fast marginalizes the female gender" (p. 131) stands in sharp contrast to more complex anthropological interpretations of women's participation in religious and kinship rituals, which locate 'everyday forms of resistance' within apparent conformity and subordination (again, see Raheja and Gold 1994).

Poitevin opens up yet another can of worms in his discussion of the methodological issues that arise from 'action' or 'participatory' research. Reviewing recent debates on authority and knowledge in the social sciences, he argues that the roles of the researcher, the subject and the activist are distinct and should remain so because critical knowledge flows from the tension between them. In place of 'participatory' research that tends to collapse these roles into one, he advocates the "cooperative production of knowledge". However, the outcome of this methodology as revealed in the studies suggests that the 'agency' of the subjects is still apt to be confused with that of the anthropologist. The chapters on fasting and on rural women health workers in particular highlight the problematic nature of attempting to 'give voice to the subordinated' and document the emergence of a critical subjectivity while not paying sufficient attention to the role of one's own voice. The account of fasting, based on a study by a "group of fifteen peasant women from a socio-cultural action-group", claims to represent the

Poitevin argues that the roles of the researcher, the subject and the activist are distinct and should remain so because critical knowledge flows from the tension between them.

study group's conclusions, but it is clear that most of the interpretation is that of the anthropologist. What kind of agency or subject-hood are we talking about when a group of village women offer a critical interpretation of their own practices and lives that matches so well with that of the facilitator/observer? If a woman who once believed that fasting would bring prosperity to her household now understands it as a mechanism for women's subordination, does this represent the emergence of a new level of political consciousness, or a new form of hegemony?

Similarly, the chapter on women health workers demonstrates the difficulties faced by NGOs and development programmes in bringing about a change of consciousness or introducing new forms of knowledge. Poor and low caste women who were brought into the programme as health animators had to be initiated, slowly and with great difficulty, into modern ideas about health as well as social issues such as caste discrimination. While their transformation into active health workers is represented as a process of cognitive change and self-assertion, it is clear that the impetus for this shift is entirely external. One feels compelled to ask whether this form of 'empowerment', which is integral to every development project today, can really lead to social transformation.

The ethnographic data and literary narratives presented in this volume offer much to the student of Indian society and to those who are concerned with social inequality and oppression. However, whatever insights that might have been gained from these studies have been diluted by a rather confused theoretical framework that neither contributes to the analysis of the data nor to the ongoing debate on subaltern agency and resistance. While a number of experiments in the production of ethnographic knowledge and writing have been tried in recent years, this attempt at the 'cooperative production of knowledge', laudable though it is, is not one of the more successful ones. ■

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Debating Caste

Deepak Mehta

CASTES OF MIND: COLONIALISM AND THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA

By Nicholas B. Dirks

Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 315, price not stated.

In one of his characteristically insightful formulations, Talal Asad has urged for a shift from the history of colonial anthropology to the anthropology of western hegemony. If the former has shown the complicity of anthropological knowledge in the career of colonialism, the latter deals with the effects of European power on non-European peoples. *Castes of Mind* falls somewhere between these two poles of historical anthropology. On the one side the text treads the familiar path of showing how taxonomies instantiated by the study of caste are the apparatuses of colonial governance, while on the other, it locates the resilience of such taxonomies in post-colonial India. Thus, Dirks historicizes the phenomenon of caste by tracing its singularities and argues that it is a discursive system by which plural identities are placed on an onomastic grid. In this sense, *Castes of Mind* raises anew the place of disciplines such as anthropology in questioning the essentialisms of non-European societies, just as much as it highlights the construction of knowledge of and on non-European peoples and places, with all its attendant ellipses and silences.

Castes of Mind is a big book, with 315 pages of small print, 50 pages of notes and 13 pages of index, a temporal span that extends over more than two hundred years, culminating finally in the Mandal agitation of 1990. The text is divided into four parts, beginning with the early colonial accounts of caste, or more appropriately, non-Indian elaborations of it. In showing how caste has become the signature of Indian society, Dirks presents in filigreed detail, the accounts of missionaries, early colonial historiographies and Orientalist scholarship. In the process, he suggests that for the Occidentalists caste became the organizing principal in matters of religion and administration, one by which colonial modernity came to intersect with the diversity of Indian traditions. In this interaction India was systematized and made available for a series of discursive operations.

These discursive operations produced what Dirks calls the 'ethnographic state', a system of colonial governmentality, informed as much by imperial ambition, as by the inability of colonial taxonomies to fully capture the native world. The unknowability of the natives and the absence of a totalizing knowledge (at least in early accounts) was coloured by a radical otherness. Consequently, colonial knowledge,

as embodied for example in the works of Risley in the nineteenth century, was always uncertain. Colonial ethnographers – Nelson, Buchanan, Risley – together with the decennial census occupied a crucial institutional role in providing the facts and installing caste as the fundamental unit of India's social structure. Dumont's work in the twentieth century reiterated this view and resurrected colonial categories and arguments. For him, as for colonial ethnographers, the political and economic aspects of caste were subsumed within the religious.

Part two of the text – 'Colonization of the Archive' – is the most impressive section. Providing an analysis of anthropological texts and accounts of his fieldwork in south India, Dirks shows the primacy of the political in the old regime – a structure of power that overrode idioms of purity and pollution. In fact, it would be futile to separate royal practices of religion and politics. The view that the old regime had its own history, conditioned by material interests, made up of political rulers and institutions, warrior clans and military success, social heterogeneity and religious admixtures was trivialized by colonial ethnographers and Orientalists. Instead, this historical sensibility was replaced by a colonial ethnology. One of the first attempts at this ethnology was undertaken by the cartographer and surveyor, Colin Mackenzie, whose archive, Dirks says, 'represents Colonial Britain's most extensive engagement with Indian history' (p. 82). Through a close reading of Mackenzie's archive and its incarnation in subsequent colonial accounts, Dirks argues that the initial steps in textualizing India had begun. Though not an orientalist, Mackenzie's effort of collecting historical documents recognized that the writing of Indian history could be separated neither from the Indians who produced it nor from Britain's involvement in establishing colonial rule in India. Flavoured as it was by the active agency of Indians producing knowledge of their own societies, Mackenzie's archive on the social and political history of peninsular India produced much more a sociology than a history. This project ended with his death in 1821. When Mackenzie's collection was referred to (in the late nineteenth century), it was merely to indicate the origin stories of local castes. This collection entered a system of discursive regularity, indicating the absence of the

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historical sensibility of Indians. Subsequent catalogues assembled by colonial ethnographers overwrote this collection by their commentaries and judgements, producing an epistemic regime marked by textual scholarship and tied to the certitude of colonial governance.

Mackenzie's collection entered the colonial regime when the voices of native scholars who produced it were silenced and when the entire collection, marked by an eclectic historical sensibility, was subjected to standards of 'authority, authorship and authenticity' (p.104). The collection entered into what Dirks calls, the imperial archive. This archive indicated that dimension of language that dealt with the system of what could or had been said. It canonized knowledge and became the 'primary site of state monumentality' (p.107). As a system of colonial discursivity, the archive provided the intellectual rationale for subsequent military conquest. 'Colonial conquest was about the production of an archive of (and for) rule. This was not an archive that was imagined on the basis for a national history, for it was designed to reap the rewards and to tell tales of imperial interest' (p.107-8). The imperial archive gave way to the colonial state in the eighteenth century, shifting in the process the balance of power from the mercantile elite to the bureaucrat. After 1857, caste emerged as the dominant trope by which India could be known and ruled. Caste was now a colonized form of civil society, with ethnography as its privileged mode of representation and was used to explain away the problem of political sovereignty.

The 'Great Rebellion' of 1857 crystallized religious and cultural differences between the colonizers and colonized. Caste, of course, was the master of ceremonies in sealing such difference. Missionaries used 1857 as an occasion to intensify their critique of caste, as evidenced in the works of the chief architect and theorist of missionary education in India, Alexander Duff. For him, as for other missionaries, caste was the main impediment to the spread of Christianity in India. By the late nineteenth century Christian triumphalism had given way to imperial ambition and by the beginning of the twentieth century, imperial ambition came to

rely increasingly on anthropology as the mode by which the history of India could be constituted. Anthropology studied those who had not yet entered modernity, while antiquarian history was the province of colonial historiography.

The last section of the book details the place of caste in social reform, its relation to nationalism, the rise of anti-Brahman movements in Madras and Maharashtra and the spectral figure of Gandhi in all of this. Through this lens Dirks engages with the two iconic figures of social anthropology in India – G.S. Ghurye and M.N. Srinivas. Dirks argues that in the relationship between Brahmanism and nationalism the force of Brahmanic hegemony is best developed within colonial history. Nationalism analyses this history even as it naturalizes a specific colonial history written over native sociologies (p.254). This argument is paradoxical. Nationalism challenges colonial history but does so through the structures of the rational tones of western scholarship. In other words, nationalism's attack, according to Dirks, is also an attack on its own analysis – it is incorrigibly western and Hegelian.

Two of the most powerful critiques of this kind of nationalism were provided by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar) and B.R. Ambedkar, both of whom argued for a distancing from Brahmanism, and both of whom claimed the need for non-Brahmans and the depressed classes to attain redress through proportional representation in the new republic. Both were also forerunners of the reservation policy of the new republic. Dirks substantiates this by analysing the Mandal agitation of 1990 and traverses a path that is too well known to reiterate here. The debate on the nature of caste is hardly resolved and Dirks offers no new insights here.

Castes of Mind will nevertheless reopen the debate of the place on caste in modern India, its commodified form and its indelible link with the colonial archive. Its achievement is that it establishes the precise connections between colonial and republican India. This is done through the agency of the archive. Dirks' use of the archive echoes Foucault's elaboration. Far from being a storehouse that catalogues the traces of what has been said, the archive is a margin that encircles and limits every concrete act of speech. Individual authors are as Dirks shows, particular subject positions within the archive. But this is also the book's chief failing. It does not tell us what lies beyond the margins of the discourse on caste. In its exploration of the links between nationalism and caste, it explains away the problem of religious solidarities. Between the memory of tradition and its ceaseless repetition in the present lies the protean figure of caste. Perhaps it is time now to explore the colonialization of religion. ■

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An Intellectual Bonanza

Praveen Jha

THINKING SOCIAL SCIENCE IN INDIA: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF ALICE THORNER

Edited by Sujata Patel, Jasodhara Bagchi, Krishna Raj
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 468, Rs. 795.00

Alice Thorner, for whom the volume under review here is a festschrift, has had a long, sustained and illustrious academic involvement with India. Beginning more than six decades ago with the doctoral project on the Indian Railways of her husband, late Daniel Thorner, she has been engaged with exploring a variety of problems associated with the Indian society and economy. Through her important contributions, both independently and in collaboration with her husband until his untimely death due to a serious illness in 1974, Alice Thorner has carved out a remarkable place for herself in the domain of social science research on India. It is a reflection of tremendous affection and admiration for her that there was an overwhelmingly positive and swift response to the editors' invitation by scholars who were asked to contribute to the festschrift volume.

The contributors to the volume, as the editors inform us, are from among those scholars who have known Alice Thorner from close quarters, both professionally and personally, and they were invited to write on the major themes that have concerned Alice Thorner over the last six decades. Given the wide spectrum of Thorner's academic concerns, and the large number of scholars who have interacted closely with her, editors must have had quite a task in conceiving the structure of the volume and selecting the list of invited contributors. All the 31 contributors kept their commitment to the deadlines, and the volume was out in less than two years of the initiation of the project.

The volume opens with an essay by one of the editors, Sujata Patel, giving a glimpse of Alice Thorner both as a social scientist and a person. This essay, full of warmth and intimacy, gives a flavour of why Alice and Daniel Thorner are held in high esteem for their remarkable contributions towards grappling with Indian economy and society, and in the process how they also came to build abiding friendships across continents and generations.

The essays, covering a variety of subjects, are divided into four parts. These are respectively titled as 'Reflecting on Contemporary Perspectives', 'Journey of the Economy', 'Culture, Literature and Language', and 'Politics in History and History in Politics'. As should be immediately evident from these titles, the spectrum of themes covered by the volume gives it the appearance of intellectual

opulence. And that sense of richness about the volume gets more and more solidly grounded as the reader goes through and savours the uniformly high quality essays. For reasons of space, it is beyond the scope of this review to discuss the individual essays even briefly here. However, it may be in order to say a few words about different sections.

The first part has seven essays and the important concern linking these together is the question of methodologies/frameworks/appropriate measurements etc. in social scientific research, either at a relatively general level or in specific contexts. In this respect, these essays are reminiscent of Thorner's own concerns whether analysing agrarian transformation in India or investigating gender related issues. Thus in Part I, Utsa Patnaik's vigorous and persuasive questioning of much of the received wisdom on famine deaths in India as well as China, Nirmal Chandra's argument that much of Chayanov's views can be incorporated within the Marxist tradition of analysing agrarian question, Jacques Pouchepadass's investigation of the so-called subaltern studies, and all the other essays make significant contributions towards the issues of method, measurement etc.

The focus of the second part, which also contains seven essays, is on a variety of themes relating to India's economic transformation since independence. The first three essays, by Ashok Mitra, K. Sardamoni and K.S. Krishnaswamy, cover a wide gamut of concerns, such as structural transformation, employment/unemployment, poverty, inequality etc., and the basic message that comes across forcefully is as follows: on most of these points, there is much that ails the Indian economy very seriously. For instance, Mitra puts forth the persuasive argument that the Indian economy continues to be characterized by lack of dynamism in the productive sectors, and the celebrated growth of the service sector does not quite give much reason for celebration for several reasons, in particular its employment implications. One of the contributions in this section is on land reforms in India, a theme central to the Thorner's intellectual landscape and the author of this essay, Joan Mencher, argues that the issues of ownership and control over land continue to have serious relevance in the present context. The other three essays in this section take up important themes such as gendered labour markets in Asian countries, vulnerable working

mother and child mortality, and the connection between the so-called globalization, ascendancy of western style consumerism and the revival of a revanchist form of cultural nationalism.

Part three of the book has seven contributions focusing on issues of culture, literature and language, and covers a very wide range. This section opens with Meena Alexander's essay on what she calls 'reflections on the making of poems, the fabrication of a shelter with words', and raises searching questions. Sylvia Batuk's essay draws upon diverse sources while investigating into one large Indian Muslim extended family and provides a most insightful account of the old age with special reference to the older women's role within the household. Patricia Uberoi's essay is concerned with baby iconography in Indian calendar art. G. Arunima investigates different representations of friendship, using 19th century Malayalam novels. Essays by Nabaneeta Dev Sen and Neera Desai take up aspects of gendered perspectives, moral regulations etc. through investigations of some epic poetry and narratives. Tista Bagchi's essay explores issues of linguistic methods in the context of minority languages in India.

The last section has ten essays, and most of these are very much at the centre-stage of political discourses in contemporary India. The first contribution here, by Amiya Bagchi, investigates the complicated relationship between nationalism and expansion of human capability, and in particular brings out the grave dangers underlying the socially conservative nationalism in India. Like Bagchi's contribution, essays by Manoranjan Mohanty, Rajni Kothari and Sunanda Sen have broad sweeps, and reflect on diverse issues such as the changing definitions of rights, the journey of the Indian nation from its hopeful stirrings after independence to one of despair and multiple tensions, and the importance of economic egalitarianism in sustaining and strengthening pluralistic societies. A couple of essays engage with the oft-visited themes of representations of Mahatma Gandhi, the factors that enabled B.R. Ambedkar's rise to prominence and contemporary Dalit movement. The rest of the essays also pick up important issues, such as the changing status of the Jats in North India, Indian broadcasting and cinema, among other themes, and offer much food for thought both in term of the substance and the freshness of their approaches.

As stated at the outset of this review, Alice Thorner's contribution towards analysing various dimensions of Indian society has been immense. This excellent volume is a fitting tribute to an outstanding scholar. ■

Praveen Jha is Associate Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Understanding the Indian Village

Ghanshyam Shah

EXPLORING INDIA'S RURAL PAST: A GUJARAT VILLAGE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

By A.M. Shah

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. 245, Rs. 525.00

One of the primary concerns of social sciences is to develop theory on social system. It involves a search for patterns(s) and/or law(s). Some scholars claiming themselves to be 'theorist' primarily preoccupied with abstraction and theory building tend to look down upon micro-studies as trivial empiricist exercises. In the process their 'scientific' inquiry reduces to dogmatism and polemic debates. Micro-studies provide a very valuable input in theory building and necessary warnings against hasty generalizations. In that sense, the village study under review is a very valuable contribution by a senior sociologist in understanding the changing nature of Indian society.

The monograph is a sociological account of the social system of a village during the first quarter of the nineteenth century; beginning of the British rule. It is an exploration of 'some of the relatively unexplored aspects of Indian village' particularly how the village functioned as a community. The village is Radhvanaj in Kheda district, central Gujarat. Though the author is a social anthropologist by academic training, it does not disqualify him to write the social history of the early colonial rule. In fact, his sociological understanding of the present day social processes make historical account more meaningful than those historians who have no training (formal or informal) in sociology. Unlike many sociologists Shah rightly believes that social change cannot be meaningfully understood without knowing history. It is interesting to note that the present study is an off-shoot of a project focusing on the relationship between the 'great tradition' and 'little tradition', as conceptualized by the Chicago school of sociologists in the 1950s. The project inquiry was confined to the Vahivancha Barots, a caste of genealogists and mythographers representing the great tradition and the field study of a village community as the little tradition. While doing the study on Vahivancha Barots in 1955-58 the author got interested in historical data of the village as the genealogists' information had certain limitations.

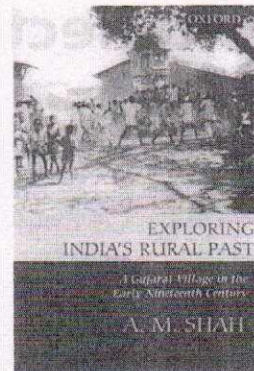
The book is based on official records of the early 1820s; compiled by officers appointed by the British government. Besides the Land Inspection Records, Kalambandhi records were prepared. They consisted of rules, regulations, customs and usages of village community. Besides analysing the information based on the above sources, the author contextualizes the village in the larger regional economic and political structure. He then describes caste,

kinship, occupations and land ownership of the village inhabitants.

According to the 1823 census the village was of multi castes, with 157 households and 720 inhabitants. Brahman, Kanbi (now known as Patidar), Koli—Pardeshi and Talpada—and Rajput were the major castes in the village. There were also eight households of Molesalam Rajputs, the Muslims. Rajputs, Brahmans and Muslims owned a very large proportion of village land and in large holdings. But they themselves did not work on land. For them manual labour was infra dig. Kanbis also owned land. They were richer than the Kolis and poorer than the Brahmans and Rajputs in terms of land ownership. They were hard working and skillful agriculturists. However, all castes were not homogeneous. Economic differentiations within castes prevailed. On the basis of the village records and other material the author observes, "occupational diversification within caste and at least some openness—or caste-neutrality, as it were—of every occupational complex were always features of the caste system and this enabled it to be responsive to economic changes" (p. 105).

The study also brings out some very interesting observations interrogating theoretical postulates widely shared in social sciences. One, a market in land seems to have prevailed in central Gujarat long before the arrival of the British. Two, that the Vanias always played a dominant role in money-lending was not applicable to central Gujarat. Besides the Vanias, the mortgagers in the village include the Rajputs, Brahmans, Kolis and Charans. Three, though the village had several service castes such as potter, blacksmith, barber, leather worker etc. there was no jajmani system as it was found in north India. Shah observes, "it can be seen that there was much more variety in mode of remunerations (both in cash and kind) to *vasvayas* (service castes)" (p. 116). The services provided by them were not entirely oriented to the 'whole' as Dumont asserted. There was considerable room for pursuit of individual interest. Four, small and simple households were predominant in the village. Five, bride price was far more prevalent than dowry. Six, remarriage of widows and divorced women were practised by the Kanbis of the village.

The caste-cluster of Koli constitutes nearly 24 per cent of the Gujarat population. They were 21 per cent in the study village. Today they are classified as 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC). They occupy an important position in contemporary Gujarat politics. According to



the author the Kolis particularly those living in areas gradually merging into the highland region 'always nursed political ambitions' (p. 22). They claimed Kshatriya status as they had fought against Rajput and Muslim rulers (perhaps around the eleventh century and later), established petty chieftains. But it was not so for the Kolis living in villages like Radhvanaj in the plains along with the Rajputs, Kanbis and other castes 'until the nineteenth century' (p. 20). One would expect from meticulous author like Shah to be more precise than giving a span of hundred years. This is because one is curious to know what made these Kolis seek the Kshatriya status in the nineteenth century. Was it, as some historians observe, because of census category, growth of non-farm occupations and Hindu social reform movement? If so, then the process of Sanskritization must have started in the late 19th century.

The author joins issue with historians who considered the traditional village an 'agrarian community'. He asserts that it was 'less accurate' as all village inhabitants in Radhvanaj were not peasants. There were a few artisans such as the potter, carpenter and tailor and also the trader (Vania) who 'had no interest in agriculture as a mode of living'. A question however arises as to when—at what level of accuracy—should one identify the community—particularly in terms of economic activities—of 'this' or 'that' type? After all, categories are theoretical constructs. If the village community was not 'agrarian' what was that? True that artisans and traders (less than 5 per cent of the population) were not working on the farm but they were certainly dependent on agriculture. It should also be noted that one out of two Vanias, all the potter and barber households had land (tables 3.2 and 7.4). Of course, it is important to mark variations that deviate from the general pattern. But at the same time one has to judiciously identify significance—extent and nature—of variation for theoretical construct.

This is indeed a well documented scholarly study useful to sociologists, anthropologists and historians. ■

Ghanshyam Shah is a Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

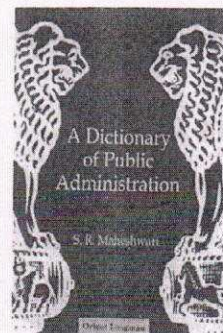
A Good First Effort

T.N. Srivastava

DICTIONARY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

By S.R. Maheshwari

Orient Longman, Delhi, 2002, pp. 544, Rs. 750.00



There is reference to patwari, tahsil, taluqa, tahsildar etc. but no mention of Collector, Deputy Commissioner, Commissioner, district or division. If Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) can find place in a volume like this, why not the principal investigating agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or the Border Security Force (BSF) or any other central police organization? Habeas corpus finds mention, but other writs—*certiorari*, *mandamus* or *quo warranto*—have been omitted. Nor has the term 'writ' been explained anywhere. There is an extensive discussion of administrative reforms in Pakistan, covering fifteen pages, besides the administrative reforms in the U.K. in the eighties, but there is nothing on the administrative reforms in India. There is not even a passing reference to the Administrative Reforms Commission of India which functioned in the late sixties and submitted umpteen reports to the Government of India. There is extensive discussion on civil services in France and Japan but there is hardly anything on the evolution or status of the civil services in India.

The dictionary contains exhaustive notes on some entries. In fact, 10 out of around 750 entries account for one-fifth of the book. And if we take another 40 entries, another one-fifth of the book is covered. Most writes-up read like class-room notes with a good amount of repetition. Thus, on Hailebury College, it has been stated, "Each pupil paid for his board and lodging and education. The fee was one hundred guineas per annum" (p. 253). Same words have been repeated on the next page on the same subject. Editing of some of the entries would make them helpful reference material for students of public administration.

Despite the shortcomings, this dictionary will be useful to any person beginning a study of the subject of public administration. It will not only help him familiarize with some of the terms presently in common usage, but will also introduce him to terms now forgotten. A first in any subject has merit. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias are generally products of teamwork. Professor Maheshwari has to be congratulated for initiating thinking in this area, and doing it on his own. ■

T.N. Srivastava has been a member of the Indian Administrative Service.

Public administration is a vast subject encompassing almost everything in which the state and its subjects are involved. The systems of governance as also the role of the state have been constantly changing and have been adapting to the social, economic, and political needs of a nation. During the course of the last one and a half centuries, the functions of the state have expanded enormously. The regulatory state has given way to the welfare state. The present emphasis on the withdrawal of the state from certain social and economic areas has not significantly altered the situation even in those countries where measures have been taken to give up functions at the local, national or regional levels. Today, there is hardly any sphere of life where an ordinary person does not come in contact with the state machinery, be it an authoritarian one, totalitarian or even democratic. Whether it be a market economy or a controlled economy, the state is intrusive and directs everybody's affairs. And the state also means its functionaries, by whatever name or nomenclature they may be designated.

In modern times, the system of administration operates through laws, rules, regulations, orders, circulars, each peculiar to the sphere of activity undertaken—maintenance of law and order, internal security, defense, dispensation of justice, accounting and management of finances—known as traditional areas of state activity and responsibility. New areas like health, education, welfare, development of infrastructure, and many other economic and social areas have been added. Administration of various services provided by the state, and the personnel entrusted with these responsibilities has itself become a subject matter for study. Public administration thus became a discipline found in the curricula of many

Today, there is hardly any sphere of life where an ordinary person does not come in contact with the state machinery, be it an authoritarian one, totalitarian or even democratic. Whether it be a market economy or a controlled economy, the state is intrusive and directs everybody's affairs.

universities, some of them specializing in this area. New terms, concepts, definitions, theories etc. evolved over the years became a subject, not only for class-room teaching, but also a useful aid to practising administrators.

Professor Maheshwari has been an exponent of the subject for almost half a century. He has taught it in the class-room and his audience included serving administrators drawn from various functional areas. He has written a number of books and articles on various issues related to Indian administration. He has been well versed in the subject, as would be evident from the exhaustive exposition of some of the topics included in this dictionary. From his student days, he had a longing for 'attempting' a dictionary on this subject. In the process of 'self-audit', he discovered it as an 'unfinished agenda'. He has given vent to his views on a number of subjects, especially those on which he has written, included in the dictionary.

Dictionaries are difficult to compile on any subject, more so on a subject which covers almost every aspect of human life. Even for a person of Professor Maheshwari's calibre, experience, and expertise, this must have been a stupendous job. About 750 entries find place in this volume, not all of them strictly related to the field of public administration. These relate to terms, concepts, theories, reports of committees and commissions, political parties, personalities and a host of other words used by the British in their private life. This being a very short volume for an exercise of this type, omissions are galore, especially when entries having little relevance in any system of administration find space. Words like 'ghusalkhana', 'gol-kamra', 'chhoti-hazri', or 'burra din' have no connection with any administration. They appear to be straight from books of fiction on the social life of the rulers during the British rule in India.

A short volume on such a vast subject needs to have a focus; the omissions are then less glaring. The selection of entries does not raise questions and eyebrows. The volume contains words like 'cadre management' without any exposition of the term 'cadre', 'district roads' without any explanation of the 'district' as a unit of administration, names of major political parties without any reference to party system, names and functions of a few parliamentary committees without any reference to 'Parliament', 'Sansad', 'Lok Sabha' and 'Rajya Sabha' or parliamentary system of governance.

Crafted Prose

Eunice de Souza

THE PIANO TUNER

By Daniel Mason

Picador, 2003, pp. 357, Rs. 395.00

David Mason, whose first novel this is read for a Bachelor's degree at Harvard and is currently a medical student at the University of California, San Francisco. He spent a year studying malaria on the Thailand-Myanmar border where much of *The Piano Tuner* was written.

No allowances need be made for *The Piano Tuner* as it is one of the most convincingly crafted prose I have read in some time. Edgar Drake, piano tuner, speciality Erard grands is asked by the War Office to go to Burma to tune an Erard grand. This bizarre request has come from Major Anthony Carroll, stationed in the Shan Hills, and to the War Office which humours him because he is useful, Major Carroll is every bit as bizarre as his request. He decides to leave his business, his wife, London and make the long sea voyage to Burma.

Edgar Drake's character, inarticulate, but strangely moved by the possibility of adventure is the mainstay of the novel. "He turned to the Colonel and nodded. They shook hands. Killian insisted on taking the piano tuner to Colonel Fitzgerald's office where he reported the news. Then more words, but Edgar was no longer listening. He felt as if he were in a dream, the reality of the decision still floating above him. He felt himself repeating the nod, as if doing so would make real his decision, would reconcile the insignificance of that movement with the significance of what it meant".

The book begins with a series of images that Drake recalls as he lies dying, shot for allegedly being a spy in the service of Major Anthony Carroll whose activities the War

Office now suspects. They cannot believe that his strange music notations, his interest in local medicinal herbs, his ability to make peace with warring lords is anything but a subtle form of betrayal. Edgar's images have a dream-like quality, and slowly fade, until all that is left is an image of a woman with a parasol. Then finally "only the sun and the parasol remain".

This section is followed by the letter from the War Office "to explain the specifics and urgency of a most serious matter". The entire book is structured in this way—the strange sights and sounds and people Edgar Drake encounters on his journey, and the sudden bolts of "realism"—when he is forced to join British officers in Rangoon on a hunt, in which a young local boy is killed accidentally by one of the officers, and in Mandalay a luncheon of British officers and their wives in which Drake finds the conversation so strangely "reproduced". "Lady Aston, my dear, I haven't seen you since the Commissioner's party in March, My dear, you look so lovely tonight..." Sometimes it is difficult to say which is more bizarre, the strange customs encountered, or the familiar customs reproduced so many miles from home.

Occasionally, though, some of the information given about Burma, while interesting, and even justifiable because Edgar Drake is being shown around, does seem like extraneous bits of local colour: the descriptions of Burmese street theatre, for instance. Then the letter which Major Carroll had asked Drake to read, in which he outlined in detail the history of the provinces he would travel to. In yet



another letter there is the story of the moving of the piano through jungles and rough terrain till it reached its destination to play its part in bringing peace to the warring lords who loved music.

There is a moving paragraph early on in the book, at the end of the hunt in which the little boy is killed accidentally that warns us of Drake's fate. "His fingers reflexively fingered a single coin that he held in his pocket, which he had kept since the hunt: a symbol of responsibility, of misplaced munificence, a reminder of mistakes, and so a talisman. In the chaos of the mourning, when all had left carrying the boy, Edgar had seen the coin lying on the ground, tipped in the dusty imprint of the boy's body. He had assumed that it had been overlooked and he picked it up simply because it was the boy's and it didn't seem right for it to be lost at the edge of the forest. He didn't know that this was a mistake... But what the children knew, and he didn't understand, he could have learned from any porter who loaded crates onto the train below. The most powerful talismans, they would have told him, are those that are inherited, and with such talismans, the fortunes inherited as well". ■

Eunice de Souza was until her recent retirement Head of the English Department of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.

BOOK NEWS

The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender and Social Inequalities in India edited by Karin Kapadia investigates the contemporary situation of women in India. Kali for Women, 2002, pp. 526, Rs. 45.00

Jewels of Authority: Women and Textual Tradition in Hindu India edited by Laurie L Patton seeks to introduce a higher level of theoretical analysis by a close reading of situations in which women are given or denied authority in ritual and interpretive contexts. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. 228, Rs. 545.00

BOOK NEWS

Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses edited by Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M Erndl engages with the impact of powerful female deities—their images, projections, textuality and history—on the social standing and psychological health of women. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 288, Rs. 595.00

Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia 1750-1950 edited by Claude Marcovits, Jacques Pouchepadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam sets out to construct an alternative positive vision to the idea of an 'eternal India' based on stable

BOOK NEWS

and unchanging villages. Permanent Black, 2002, pp. 364, Rs. 695.00

Western Medicine and Public Health in Colonial Bombay 1845-1895 by Mridula Ramanna is a historical account of the hospitals and dispensaries in the city of Bombay. Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2002, pp. 220, Rs. 550.00

Rethinking the Mahabharata by Alf Hiltebeitel is a reader's guide to the education of Yudhishthira. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 366, Rs. 645.00

Another Unique Journey

Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta

REACHING BOMBAY CENTRAL
By Shama Futehally
Viking, 2002, pp. 154, Rs. 225.00

There's something about train journeys. Oh, they're dusty, noisy and interminable – and the ticket collectors keep waking you up at all the wrong times. They're all that, and then there's that smell, too. And yet each train journey is unique in its own way – in the people you meet, the jokes you hear, the pickles you taste, the confidences you share. The best journeys are never the flights taken from Point A to Point B – they're always the days spent inside warm and friendly train compartments. There's a magic in that solidarity.

Shama Futehally's second novel, *Reaching Bombay Central*, is the story of one such train journey, from Delhi to Bombay. Middle-aged Ayesha Jamal is 'wishing that she had never left home', for more reasons than just the inevitable need to haggle with the coolie. The wife of a senior bureaucrat whose name is under a cloud at present (this is surely, suggests the narration, just another form of discrimination by the powers that be), Ayesha is travelling to Bombay. Despite her misgivings about the whole enterprise, she is going there to seek the help of an uncle who, although rather an unsavoury type himself, happens to be well placed in the police ('one who had reached the stage', she tells us, 'where sirens announced the arrival of his armoured car'). More importantly, he is about to retire, and can therefore show some of the courage that he never showed in the earlier part of his service. Courage to pick up the phone and tell someone that the Enquiry against Aarif Jamal had better be fair.

Train journeys are among the few things that seem to bring Indians together these days. Ayesha's fellow travellers are such types, each of them: an elephantine, khadi-clad politician followed by 'an anxious young man in a safari suit'; an achingly sensible Iyer girl going to Bombay for a job interview; a helpful journalist in search of the real story about the riots. Yes, there's a world out there, a world of riots, job interviews, politics and dangerous notings in files – a world that goes on, while these men and women are temporarily cocooned inside their compartment, playing out the scenes of their journey. And inside the train, there are the minor characters of the journey – the Bihari porters, the persistent beggars, the sweeper-boys. The water bottles to be filled, newspapers to be read, and tea-coffee to be had. Time, as they say, to be passed.

Ayesha is rescued from her fate worse than death by a strange *deus ex machina* that would have been improbable, if only it weren't so very possible. When governments change, files tend to move from the tops to the bottoms of heaps. Politics and religion are the obsessions of the day, but do the people travelling in the train really care? They are looking away, at the things that really matter, like friendship and beauty, and birds. There is a breathtakingly lovely moment in the story, as the train is pulling itself slowly towards Bombay, when Ayesha sees wild birds in a monsoon landscape: "Black-winged Stilts picked their way with delicate precision...A White-breasted Waterhen darted across the flats; two or three Pond Herons waited at the edge like impassive courtiers; the light brown of a sandpiper turned like a blown leaf against the dark brown mud."

Reaching Bombay Central is not a perfect story – it has several weaknesses, especially where its rigid political correctness threatens to

tattle the flimsy structure of the story completely. One would also have wished for a little less vagueness in the telling. What, in fact, was the favour that had been done, and that had landed Ayesha's husband in trouble; what is meant by 'a little nimbleness in regard to procedure'; and why did Aarif, who would normally draw back from such a matter, stick his neck out this one time? We shall never know.

And yet, perhaps it's just that all of us are human. There is ultimately something sad and pathetic about the rationalizations and the justifications that Futehally describes—arguments that are as familiar in the course of life's many decisions, as in the landscape of *babudom*—which usually precede such nimbleness in procedure. The ethical minefield of decision-making in government often calls for deep thought on every issue. And yet sometimes, it is the decision that isn't quite the most ethical—or, to put it simply, the wrong decision—that can will itself to be taken. In governance, as in all of life. And one can only ask for fairness in being judged.

A gentle and tender story, if somewhat slight; and Futehally's elegant sentences, where they are not going over the top in reproducing the sing-song cadences of Indian English, have a compelling music of their own. A thought-provoking tale. ■

Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta is a civil servant and columnist based in Mumbai.

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Dilemmas of Being a Christian

Pratima Mitchell

NIRMAL BABU'S BRIDE

By Alison Mukherjee

Indialog Publications, 2002, pp.192, Rs. 195.00

Amongst all the acreage of comment and breast-beating about Hindu-Muslim hostility and the nature of communal disharmony, little is ever mentioned about the other thorn goading the Hindutva flesh, the Christians of northern India. Aside from spurts of murder, rape and arson that erupt against the community, Christians remain a hidden sore. Perhaps because of their numerical insignificance—23 million in a majority population of 1 billion, and most of them originally from the lower castes—the general undercurrent of suspicion against them has become part of the scenery. Free associating, “Christian” would probably be linked to “missionary”, “freeloader”, “alien” or “foreign” and, almost certainly, unpatriotic.

Both Christians and Muslims share unenviable minority status. Subconsciously they are perceived as the enemy, a sleeping antagonist sometimes dangerously on the prowl; sometimes scarcely Indian, but an intruder, or at best an outsider. In popular imagination, one sort of enemy came rampaging over the Hindu Kush swollen with blood-thirsty bigotry and lust; the other sort sailed over the Black Water to seize the wealth of India, distorting and muddying native culture in their pursuit of Mammon. Both conquerors mocked Hindu sensibilities by smashing temples and sitting in judgment over Hindus, regarded as pusillanimous, superstitious and backward. Worst of all the foreigners converted the natives' own kith and kin, turning their thinking inside out and causing them to despise the beliefs of their sacred motherland. Former Hindus, say the fundamentalists, have been denatured.

This was all a very long time ago, in the fifties and early sixties, and things have moved on since then. Shirley and Primrose who hovered uncertainly on the cusp of West and East and willy-nilly created a defensive wall between themselves and the larger culture christen their daughters with robustly Hindi, if non-Hindu, names. They wear *bindis* and *salwar kameez* but nobody pats them on the back because now everyone around them is sporting jeans and skirts.

Christians have made their presence felt since early in the first millennium. St Thomas arrived in India in a boat, but some say overland, from the Middle East. Jesuits argued their theology with Emperor Akbar in the 16th century, and seriously engaged his interest. In the 19th century a very few upper class families

(mostly in Bengal and Punjab) converted, mainly through the influence of western education. The emergence of the reformist Bengali crypto-Christian Brahmo Samaj created a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity. When the founder of the Samaj, the aristocratic Ram Mohun Roy, called himself a Hindu Christian he was rather a hero. Several wealthy Bengalis gave their allegiance to Protestantism and their descendants still largely call themselves Christian, but more like a caste, in terms of a cultural and social definition, than in terms of active belief or faith. Among the famous converts who acquired a status bordering on the saint-like were Sadhu Sunder Singh, a Sikh mystic, and Pandita Ramabai, a Maharashtrian Brahmin woman.

Hostility to Christians always intensified when rumours of conversion plans were fanned. One factor leading to the Sepoy Mutiny was a deep suspicion that the British were fomenting a master plan to forcibly bring the Indian army to Christ. However, just over fifty years later Gandhi was professing his admiration for the Sermon on the Mount. So, off and on for hundreds of years there has been a genuine engagement with Christian values, if not with the divinity of Christ, until the newish concept of Hindutva conceived Christians to be a threat against the nation. Pre-emptive or not, the fundamentalist BJP-inspired hostility to Christians is now an inescapable fact of life, the embarrassing crassness of which extends to calling Italian born Sonia Gandhi, Congress Party president, a handmaiden of the Pope. No one bothers to find out if she has even attended mass for the last twenty years! Otherwise Christians are conveniently labelled as C.I.A agents. To be a Christian, then, is to harbour subversive attitudes, as well as ambivalent loyalties. But perhaps the greatest irritant to Hindus is the provocative electivity of Christianity—“no one comes to the Father save through me”. Taken literally, this saying of Jesus straightaway condemns all other faiths and creates a spiritual apartheid.

If the best way to understand and empathize with other people, particularly those from different backgrounds, is to read about them Indian Christians suffer from a great disadvantage. Apart from one obscure 19th century Bengali novel there hasn't been much accessible fiction about them, although some must exist in regional languages, especially in



South India. If only because of redressing this gap in our consciousness, Alison Mukherjee's first novel, *Nirmal Babu's Bride*, deserves attention. Mukherjee, a lecturer in theology with experience of living in a Bengali Christian community, tells the story of Nirmal, an elderly Bengali who is stuck in a time warp. His fossilized mentality was cast by the missionaries of his younger days, who aimed at creating an ethic where converts would “behave like decent Christians”. An unthinking victim of religious imperialism, for him everything separates into Hindu or Christian, instead of just Bengali. Ever since his wife deserted him to live in England with their youngest daughter, he has become bitter and set in his ways. For him forgiveness takes a lifetime to mature; he has not absorbed one of the central tenets of his faith.

Rupa, the “English” daughter returns to Bengal with the aim of unravelling the mystery of her parents' separation. The reason for the family break-up is ostensibly the wife's disloyalty, but this turns out to be a small thing that was blown up out of all proportion by Nirmal. By the time Rupa uncovers the mystery, the reader has gained some insights into the lives of a Christian family set in the context of today's Hindu majority rule; some, but not enough.

The author has an acute eye for detail and is especially observant on how children behave. Her descriptions of the humdrum existence of a small town and affectionate sketches of characters are written in fluid—sometimes poetic—style, which makes this novel an enjoyable read. But where it might have been singular in exploring the incompatibilities between the minds of the Hindu and the convert and the very real social and political tensions between the communities Mukherjee has, regrettably, skirted the issue. True, the Communists have fostered a less formidably partisan attitude amongst Bengali Hindus than other state governments, but throughout India the old relaxed pluralism is now a nostalgic memory.

Elsewhere, the author has explained that her main interest lay in using ideas that surfaced from her doctoral thesis, “Biblical Bangla”, and from her study of the Old

Testament book of the prophet Hosea, in which the twin themes of adultery and apostasy try the patience and love of God. Hosea's idol-worshipping wife, the non-Jewish Gomer, is represented by Nirmal's wife. Miss Featherstone, the missionary, who is both benign and manipulative with her power, arranges a marriage between the Christian teacher Nirmal and the daughter of a Hindu Bania family. Keen to inject fresh blood into the torpid atmosphere of her mission school, she represents the high-handedness of colonial power, with its claim to greater wisdom. The lure of a non-dowry marriage attracts the daughter of a goldsmith who enthusiastically takes to the gospel message and settles down with her much older husband. But three children later, Nirmal Babu discovers his wife's secret journal; she wants to convey her understanding of her Christian faith to her Hindu family and is being assisted in this difficult task by her male tutor. Nirmal's sense of exclusion makes him rage against her disloyalty, but his anger and rejection of his wife seem totally disproportionate to her offence. Again, Miss Featherstone steps in by finding Rupa's mother a position as companion to a retired missionary in England. Charming and delicate as are the drawings of Bengali small town life, the author has tried too hard to stretch a canvas over a pre-ordained allegorical frame, and this inhibits not only the story from developing, but the characters from assuming the dimension they

deserve. Rupa's mother and sister exhibit a strength and dignity that run counter to the popular idea of the submissive female, but they are short-changed. Mukherjee's interesting ideas struggle to emerge as an organic part of the narrative and the plot strains to contain everything the author wants to say.

At the end of Rupa's stay, Nirmal has forgiven his wife for the blow to his pride and dignity, and Rupa returns to England with a greatly enlarged sense of her roots.

Truly speaking, these Bengali Christians are not just Bengalis, they are outsiders and even more so today. They are extraordinary in weathering hostility from the ruling BJP and Mukherjee is not completely successful in plumbing the hearts and minds of this beleaguered community. Once, there is criticism of a tactless Padre Babu who tries to link the murder of an Australian missionary and his sons with the destruction wreaked by a coastal cyclone. In another instance someone asks why Pope John Paul II didn't think about "what could happen to us... why didn't someone tell him how Hindu nationalists would react?" (The Pope on a recent visit to India spoke of bringing in the harvest from Asia.)

When Rupa's young nephew Bijoy accidentally knocks over a plaster deity in a neighbour's home shrine and hides in terror in a mango tree, there is an opportunity to nail the drama to a wider screen, but this is left unexploited. No dire consequences follow the

wrath of the neighbour's discovery of the misdeed, just raised voices.

Perhaps the author was wary of causing controversy, or offence, but her politeness leaves many questions hanging. Why did Nirmal Babu's ancestors convert to Christianity? What did it cost them? What does it cost him and his family now? How do they stand distinguished from their neighbours, apart from not performing pujas? If they are not so different, why do they consider themselves "Christians"? Is their quietism the only viable way to exist in India? "Privately he (Nirmal) can believe that only Christians will be saved, will go to Heaven, but that doesn't stop him continuing to live decently with Hindus. He doesn't want to say it publicly that's all. No civilised person wants trouble."

But not all Christians live by that. Some, surely, try and follow the Beatitudes subscribed to by Gandhiji. Are they able to practise their convictions in real life? How do they marry the internal and external?

Even though these and many other questions were probably not within the author's horizons, they still raise their heads. Antagonism towards Christians is an ugly fact and a story about this reality still waits to be written. ■

Pratima Mitchell writes books for children and newspaper articles. She is based in Oxford and New Delhi.

EVAM: FORUM ON INDIAN REPRESENTATIONS
 Edited by Makarand Paranjape
 Samvad India Foundation, 1: 1 and 2 (2002)

Samvad India's new journal *Evam: Forum on Indian Representations* was inaugurated with a double issue in August 2002. Editor Makarand Paranjape, explains its *raison d'être*: the idea is to create a space for critical writing about India that is neither journalistic nor constrained by the limits of a given discipline. It is aimed at the informed reader who wants more than mere news-coverage and yet does not share the specialist's enthusiasm for academic jargon and extensive footnotes in any one field. Paranjape claims that *Evam* will be "... a well-researched journal, specialized when it needs to be, contemporary or historical in its subject matter, rigorous as well as creative – in short, a sort of flexible and polyglot assemblage...." Amen to that.

The contributors are an eclectic lot, based in India and abroad: several scholars, a

filmmaker, a monk, three novelists, a couple of biographers, and even a software entrepreneur! What's interesting is that many of them depart from the genres they might be most at home in. Tantra expert Madhu Khanna describes a spectacular multimedia exhibition on Banaras that she was involved in conceiving, standing at the confluence of tradition, technology and design. Kiran Nagarkar and Dev Benegal playfully engage one another, as well as Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* – Benegal directed a film based on Chatterjee's novel (the shooting script for which is presented here), and is directing another one based on Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*. Dipesh Chakrabarty and Amitav Ghosh make public a learned conversation between them; Paranjape himself tries his hand at reading Bollywood as a post-colonial critic. Everyone seems to be having fun.

The one exchange that strikes a slightly negative chord in the otherwise upbeat inauguration of a good idea, is the piece by Swami Tyagananda and a response by Jeffrey J. Kripal. The swami, who is part of the

Ramakrishna Order of the Vedanta Society, Boston, attacks the American religionist Kripal's runaway academic bestseller *Kali's Child* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) that excavates the nineteenth century Bengali mystic Ramakrishna's sexuality through a reading of his life and works.

However, this is just one aberration in an otherwise well-conceived and well-executed collage. The journal's graphics and layout are appealing – presumably Samvad India Foundation and its partner agency Infinity Foundation have pockets deep enough to sustain the production quality. If *Evam* is to live up to the deictic in its very title (Sanskrit *evam* = "thus", "so", "in this way") and be the exemplar of its own type, it must continue to invite contributions that distinguish themselves not by their "passion and / or lucidity", but by both passion and lucidity. There's every reason to hope that this journal will be widely circulated and positively received. ■

Ananya Vajpeyi is working on the Ph.D at the University of Chicago.

A Double-barrelled Political Biography

Gautam Chakravarty

BROTHERS IN THE RAJ: THE LIVES OF JOHN AND HENRY LAWRENCE

By Harold Lee

Oxford University Press, 2002, Karachi, pp. 437, Rs. 595.00

Political biography is an interesting if obscure part of British writing on India, a small but distinct body of texts that reworked metropolitan political biography to represent territorial expansion and colonial state building by representing the lives of its agents. Among the earliest instances of Anglo-Indian biography are John Malcolm's *Life of Robert, Lord Clive* (1826), and T. B. Macaulay's *Life of Clive* (1828), which were followed by well-circulated series such as John W. Kaye's *Lives of Indian Officers* (1867), and Henry Morris' *Heroes of our Indian Empire* (1908), besides numerous popular stand-alone biographies: of military commanders, proconsuls, and administrators. Though heroic and foundational, the biographical subject of Malcolm and Macaulay was however a little too rakish, and hence uneasily included in the pantheon of liberal-evangelical empire builders. It was after the Sikh wars of the 1840s that the pantheon took shape in Anglo-Indian biographies, gathering sharpness of focus and high seriousness over subsequent decades, as the reconstituted imperial machinery rose and fell between 1858 and 1947.

Anglo-Indian biography writing has continued sporadically after Independence. Like Roselli's *Lord William Bentinck* (1974), Patrick French's biography of Francis Younghusband (1994), and Nayana Goradia's biography of Curzon (1993) are among the more recent examples, but without the sonorous asseverations of racial-national duty and moral probity that were staple in colonial biography during its heyday. During that heyday, Anglo-Indian biography fashioned the self-image of a ruling class, and recorded at times the 'making' of middle Britain, without prospects at home but the equal of rajas and nawabs in India. Biography worked as a means to legitimize British overseas expansion before Home opinion, generating and circulating the characterology of the colonial administrator: or army officer, slaving selflessly in the outposts of empire, or 'pacifying' an unruly people. The self-image percolated into forms of popular media from the 1880s, giving a shrill and jingoist cast to overseas investment, and transported to the new acquisitions in Africa a military-administrative ethos whose origins were Anglo-Indian. Much of this history is now of little interest in India, and it is signifi-

cant that this book was published in Pakistan, a country that still honours the Brits with Abbottabad, Lyallpur, and Jacobabad.

Brothers in the Raj is double-barrelled, twining the careers of the Lawrence brothers, John and Henry, who became subjects of biographies bordering on hagiography from the late-nineteenth century. The twining is made possible by the fact that the careers of the two men overlapped in the 'settlement' of the Punjab and the Frontier between c.1840-1870. The career of Henry Lawrence, the elder of the two, began in the Bengal artillery in 1823, and in 1833 he joined the survey department of the North-Western Provinces. His chequered subsequent career included proconsular assignments in Nepal, Lahore, and Rajputana, manipulating the Sikh kingdom for the better part of the 1840s, preparing a legal code for Sikhs after the Treaty of Bhairawal (1846), and heading the board of administration after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. The most spectacular and final act of Henry Lawrence's career was in Awadh, where he was sent following annexation in February 1856 to administer a region simmering with discontent. The outbreak of the rebellion, the siege of the Lucknow Residency, and the death of Henry Lawrence during the siege transformed him into the iconic Mutiny hero-martyr.

Less spectacular but with long-term consequences, John Lawrence's Punjab career began with the commissionership of the newly annexed Jullunder district in 1846. As commissioner, and later as financial member of the administrative board of which Henry was president, John Lawrence initiated a reform package that included revenue and land resettlement, the creation of a police force and courts of law, the abolition of internal trade duties, and the encouragement of canal and road construction. While British intervention in the region, as in other annexed kingdoms, cut short indigenous processes of state building, the transformation of the Punjab from a world of feuding chieftains and tribes, of peasants and mercenaries into something of a civil society, and its integration within wider economic and administrative systems laid the groundwork for the agricultural prosperity of modern Punjab. The dour but earnest 'Punjab school', represented by the Lawrence brothers,

Brothers in the Raj is double-barrelled, twining the careers of the Lawrence brothers, John and Henry, who became subjects of biographies bordering on hagiography from the late-nineteenth century.

Herbert Edwardes, James Abbott, John Nicholson, Robert Montgomery, and John Jacob, and by Francis Brayne early in the twentieth century, carried out much of this work with a Samuel Smiles-like work ethic, while avidly playing the Great Game from the promontory of the Frontier.

Brothers in the Raj builds on archival sources and private papers, and will interest historians of the Indian Punjab, and of Pakistan, the NWFP, and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. That said the book would have benefited from some reflection on larger issues, and a willingness to look beyond the Punjab. Biography as an element in colonial discourse ought to have figured somewhere. There is no mention of the family resemblances between the 'Punjab school' and Alfred Milner's 'kindergarten' in South Africa, and no attempt at all to point out the significant overlaps between the iconography surrounding the Lawrence brothers and Charles Gordon in Taiping and Khartoum. ■

Gautam Chakravarty teaches in the Department of English, University of Delhi, Delhi.

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A Writer's Odyssey

Tapan Basu

BOMBAY-LONDON-NEW YORK

By Amitava Kumar

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 224, Rs. 250.00

"This book is a record of my reading practice. It bears witness to my struggle to become a writer. I view the pages that follow only as marginal entries in a book written by others. In places, I have put my finger on the place where a writer has signed his or her name.

This book tells the story of the many times that I have opened the thick book of Indian writing in order to divine signs for the journey I was about to undertake. The name I have given this literary journey is *Bombay-London-New York*." Amitava Kumar's "literary journey", as he calls it, is much more than a record of a writer's odyssey through the writings of other writers. While tracking the growth of the writer's mind, the book also seeks to negotiate the writer's shifting locations in a 'globalized' world and to thereby arrive at an understanding of the complexities of diasporic identity.

The phenomenon of diaspora is problematized by Amitava Kumar throughout his narrative. As he remarks in his "Conclusion", the diasporic experience is as likely to do with the experience of fleeing as it is to do with the experience of flying from the homeland. The experience of the flying / fleeing stowaway trapped to death in the undercarriage compartment of an aircraft, represents, as Kumar observes, "the other and silent half of the story of international travel and tourism." "We are reminded" says Kumar, ruminating upon the dead stowaway's failure to immigrate, "that not every one crosses borders alive, despite the cheerful acceptance of globalization by many governments of the world." If the immigrant experience is fraught with tensions, so is her/his longing for a "homeland".

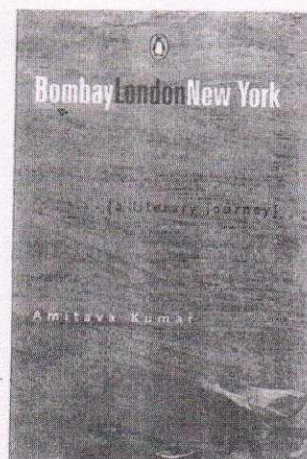
Kumar is unambiguously antipathetic to the "soft emotion of nostalgia" in the diaspora which is often translated into the "hard emotion of fundamentalism." Addressing himself to the fundamentalist constituency

While tracking the growth of the writer's mind, the book also seeks to negotiate the writer's shifting locations in a 'globalized' world and to thereby arrive at an understanding of the complexities of diasporic identity.

among the N.R.I.s., he wonders whether it is not possible "to use the memories of our loss, our not-too-burdensome displacement, and even our sometimes huge gains to reflect not only on our past but also on the processes through which we create our pasts?" If we were to reflect "on the processes through which we create our pasts," Kumar claims, it would be impossible for us to pine for a mythical past, grandiose and glorious, and "then shed blood, ours and that of others, to protect that unreal, entirely illusory sense of ourselves." The India of our pasts, avers Kumar, has historically been a place of cultural mixing, and this process has continued in the diaspora where "our roots have given way to routes."

According to Kumar, our heritage of cultural mixing has been mapped out in the fiction of many contemporary Indian writers which reveal that our memories as Indians are also memories of movements across different countries and continents and not just a memory of an original source... "We have built our homes in Britain, in Burma, in Africa, in South America, in the Caribbean, and in North America. If our past was all these places, can we be nostalgic for only one place? Can we be nostalgic for a place that never was?" It is in this spirit and with the conviction that all the cities mentioned on our tickets actually hide secrets of other places, small towns and villages, and of people who are perpetually being lost to history, that Amitava Kumar writes his own narrative in *Bombay-London-New York*. The narrative is structured in three parts corresponding to the names of the three cities mentioned in his title. But the cities are not so much the geographical locations through which Kumar travels as they are the significant metonyms for the modernity they represent. The modern metropolis is apparently a site of cultural mixing but actually accentuates of a fundamentalist culture.

Cultural fundamentalism indeed is the obverse of the kind of cultural mixing – "the hybridity of Advani-and-Andy"—that Kumar associates with Bombay. Kumar is quick to distinguish between this perfunctory hybridization which operates on the basis of the yoking together of certain totems of disparate cultures and the principled hybridization that is epitomized in such coalitions that make up the protestors against the dams of Narmada. In the context of the Narmada movement, and



the people's movements worldwide, he points out, 'hybridity' acquires an oppositional political meaning.

Thus Kumar comes to the conclusion that there is no golden 'hybridity'. The concept of 'hybridity', in spite of its celebration in contemporary Indian fiction in the English language, is open to contradictory uses. Its contested terrain, which extends from the small towns of India on the one hand to the western megapoles on the other hand, is a by-product of globalization – a globalization whose material benefits are unevenly distributed between nations, communities and individuals. These inequities inevitably manifest themselves as identity – anxieties and engender a climate conducive to the creation of a culture of fundamentalism. Under these circumstances, the task of the diasporic intellectual – and from Kumar's reference-point every intellectual, in fact every citizen, of the globalized world is diasporic – as Kumar interprets it, is to negotiate the ground between fetishization of one's native culture and forgetting of one's native culture... "the point is to ascertain what our narratives of travel are going to be. Against the mythologies of the Hindi films that offer paeans to the glory of the abandoned nation, apart also from more sophisticated fictions of writers who unfurl the magic realist drama of diasporic lives, what I would like to know more about are the day-to-day struggles, successes, failures, and confusions of the ones who leave home to seek better fortune elsewhere. And equally crucial, what I want to see are accounts of what is suffered as well as celebrated in the most ordinary of ways by those who do not leave, those who stay behind, whether because they want to or simply because it cannot be otherwise".

All in all, *Bombay-London-New York* is a cultural studies work which is well worth its read. ■

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The Plural Heritage of India

Meenakshi Bharat

EARLY NOVELS IN INDIA

Edited by Meenakshi Mukherjee

Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 278, Rs. 140.00

Published under the aegis of the Sahitya Akademi, the national caretaker and promoter of letters of India, and edited by a pillar of critical opinion, Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Early Novels in India* promises to be a sure-fire combination. Spurred by this initial recognition, the intelligent reader is bound to find much to excite him in this collection of fourteen essays by leading literary critics, literary historians and literary theorists, which focuses on early Indian novels in various Indian languages. The book is thoughtfully divided into two parts, with Section I concentrating on the socio-cultural contexts and the circumstances of literary production, including the problems associated with the very act of writing, and with publication. The second section takes on particular texts placed within these contexts. All the articles were originally presented as papers at a national seminar co-hosted by the Sahitya Akademi and the Centre for Comparative Literature, Kerala University at Thiruvananthapuram.

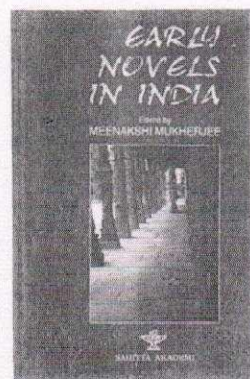
What the book certainly accomplishes is the opening of a window to the richness of the plural heritage of India through the diversity of the literary cultures of different linguistic areas. The dynamics of the continuing colloquy between local and other cultures, within India, and with the English tradition, prompts a redefinition of the genre of the novel and a subsequent extension of its limits. The byzantine interplay and fallout of the complex intersections of 'social, cultural and economic changes taking place during the colonial era' keeping in mind 'the variables of history, geography and the narrative genealogy of each linguistic region', comes out tantalizingly through the wide-range of approaches and subject matter of the contributing scholars. The issues of nationalism (the Jamesonian paradigm of the conflation of the birth of the idea of the nation with the rise of the novel is a reiterated concern), modernity, individualism, slavery, religion, ethics, writing at the margins (with due attention paid to the troublesome issues of class, caste and gender), all find their way into the essays.

Several interesting facts are thrown up by the generally extensive span of the essays. Firstly, while most contributing scholars and critics would love to deny the fact that the novel is a foreign genre, yet the fact that it is a late entrant in the literary mapping of the country evidently makes it difficult to completely denounce the link. In what emerges as an incessant and intense underlying debate, the realist, linear, positivist western paradigm

of the novel is constantly and compulsively questioned as the progenitor of the early Indian novel. Dilip Menon may bemoan the appearance of 'tired' opposition binaries, but himself cannot escape the use of the current 'popular' critical terminology of the West. However exciting the prospect of laying claim to the genre by quoting local and indigenous legacies may appear, it would seem that the 'English' antecedents are undeniable. Disraeli, Dickens, Bunyan, Reynolds are names which crop up with fair regularity in the essays.

As a result, the early English novel in India is sought to be ensconced in typically Indian narrative modes such as the *qissa*, the *dastan*, the *katha*, *charit*, *prabandhas*. Thus, as a significant upshot, Indian poetics becomes a recognized critical entry point as evinced in Udaya Kumar's tracing of Sanskrit rhythms and prose in the Malayalam novel, and in Namwar Singh's somewhat stretched claim of the beginnings of the magic realist mode in the *Kadambari* tradition in early novels like the 1885 *Shyama Swapna*. At the same time, terms and concepts such as deconstruction, postcoloniality, as also the names of key players in the field of criticism in the West (Aijaz Ahmed, Frantz Fanon, Frederic Jameson) are constantly approached in this analytical effort. This volume then, goes a long way in opening up these new avenues of enquiry marking the coming together of western and Indian critical modes, positing multiple entry points, astutely introduced and tied up by the editor in the clear, succinct introduction.

Indeed, if there is anything significantly lacking in the collection of essays, it is the limited number of Indian languages covered. But, one supposes these are due to the constraints of compiling the presentations at a seminar. This volume is by no means a complete and comprehensive study. Nor, to be fair, does it claim to be one. But it certainly performs the important function of igniting curiosity by the formulation of probing questions for fiction in languages not touched, and for suggesting directions for the analysis and understanding of texts not documented or listed, thus taking on a felicitous propulsive force. Even the handy chronological list of early narratives which follows the essays at the end of book iterates the invitation to further research. For this, Namwar Singh articulates the urgency of the need for the location of 'genuine literary critics who have the conceptual clarity.' This volume, with its searching and insightful compositions, makes a *beginning*



in meeting this very demand. ■

Meenakshi Bharat is in the Department of English, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, Delhi.

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Focussing on the Here and Now

Ratna Raman

DORIS LESSING: JOURNEY IN EVOLUTION

By Alka Kumar

Books Plus, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 148, Rs. 300.00

One of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century, Doris Lessing (1919-) has been writing for over sixty years. Other than essays, full length studies on her British and African experience, plays, short stories and poems, her experimentation with the genre of the novel has allowed her to write fiction that falls variously into the categories of realistic fiction, science fiction, memoirs, travelogue and diaries to name a few.

Lessing's formidable oeuvre notwithstanding, interest in her work in India has been minimal. This is despite the overlap of shared spaces that Lessing occupies both as a colonial and as an outspoken critic of the colonial system. In Lessing we have a writer born in Persia, in the aftermath of World War I, daughter of a war veteran and a nurse who grew up in Southern Rhodesia. Coming of age before World War II, Lessing disavowed racism, identified with the promises of communism, opted out of a marriage, leaving behind two children to follow a more nebulous calling. Living in England since 1949 with a son from a second marriage, Lessing has remained an autodidactic writer and her work has constantly engaged with the important events of her time; a commitment to and subsequent disillusionment with the Left, the anti-nuclear marches, white-middleclass women's movements in the late sixties, an anxiety over terrorism, an interest in cultural and political processes outside of the western world in Africa and in Afghanistan as well as a skepticism about the nature of progress posited by the march of science and technology.

Lessing's work has received great attention in other parts of the world and now that her magnum opus *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is part of the Delhi University undergraduate syllabus in English literature and will remain so until the next revision there should be an opening of floodgates as far as Lessing studies in India are concerned. Alka Kumar's publication is the second full-length study of Doris Lessing's work by an Indian, the first publication being a comparative analysis of Doris Lessing and Nayantara Sahgal (1991). Kumar's introductory chapter places Doris Lessing within a critical tradition that locates her work as interrogating realistic-historical, mythic-fantastic and racial premises and sees the concept of evolution as summarizing "the crux of Lessing's philosophy". In a subsequent chapter Kumar identifies "feminism, psychoanalysis and Sufism" as the significant influences on Lessing's work upto the early seventies.

A later chapter 'Africa explores', "Lessing's vision of Africa as a savage land capable of letting loose repressed forces of anarchy and derangement" with references from her fictional and non-fictional writing on Africa. This is followed by a look at Lessing's science fiction and its new cosmologies through which "other worlds...different versions of empire where there is systemic colonization" are evoked, enabling the author to handle with "epic scope multidimensional issues that it would have been impossible to cope with in the realistic narrative genre".

The chapter entitled 'Autobiography'

focuses on Lessing's ability to transform autobiographical material "creatively and imaginatively" beyond recognition. Kumar performs a similar feat when she compares Lessing's impetuous marriage to Frank Wisdom (documented in the first volume of Lessing's autobiography 'Under My Skin') with "the mindless behaviour of her first protagonist Mary Turner". One only hopes that this is an error of omission particularly since the subsequent instances that Kumar cites evoke the experiences not of Mary Turner but of Martha Quest, Lessing's second protagonist, whose fictional life for the greater part is drawn from her author's. While Kumar in this section provides general observations on the genre of autobiography and emphasizes that it constitutes a certain reality that is in Lessing's case "more significant than it may be for others" she does not really spell out why.

Lessing is a writer whose prolificacy dazzles and whose versatility invites awe and Kumar's postscript reflects this, particularly in her acknowledgement that "there can be no concluding remarks in the face of a perpetually changing reality, the scope of which is forever expanding and seeking modification". While an introduction to Lessing's work in the context of the drought in Lessing studies in India is welcome, one wonders why Kumar stops at a general stocktaking of Lessing's work. Despite Lessing's fascination with the mystical and the fantastic, her novels over the last decade and more have repeatedly focused on the here and now and have signalled her engagement with the world of the living, an aspect that has characterized her work from the very beginning. One wishes that Kumar had given us more of this doughty Lessing, grounded and alert to the zeitgeist in lieu of the evolved and transcendent wise woman her study posits. ■

Ratna Raman is a Reader in English at Sri Venkateswara College, New Delhi, and is working on a doctoral dissertation on Doris Lessing.

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Indian Exotica?

Seetha

PADDY INDIAN

By Cauvery Madhavan
Penguin India, 2002, pp. 237, Rs. 250.00

Forget the way the book begins. About an Indian sitting on the pot on his first day in Ireland, coping with the physical shock of the cold seat and recalling the hectic preparations back home in Madras for his trip. The mother triple sealing pickle bottles, packing in plastic mugs for use in the loo, the silver Lakshmi velakku (lamp). It has all the makings of another book of Indian stereotypes. Fortunately, the book does not dwell too much on such clichés. *Paddy Indian* is about the travails of an Indian who travels abroad. It is about Padhman (short for Padmanabhan and further shortened to Paddy) a young doctor, the third generation of a highly pedigreed family of gynaecologists in Madras, who comes to Dublin to appear for his Fellowship exam. Not only has he to come to terms with the fact that he has to start at the bottom of the heap all over again after having completed his internship in Madras but he also has to cope with an alien culture.

Madhavan beautifully captures the lack of confidence and anxieties that even highly westernized and wealthy Indians experience when they are abroad. Indeed the best parts of the book are when she is describing Padhman's fears and insecurities whenever he is dealing with the foreigners. It begins from the first day at the hospital when he wonders whether he should introduce himself, cringes when the takeaway delivery boy comes with an order of Beef Madras hoping nobody thinks it is for him, imagining situations and running conversations through his head where people mock Indians etc. "He wandered aimlessly around the hospital for a while, trying to find an explanation for his self-conscious behaviour. He concluded that it was nothing to do with the Irish. In fact, it was those bastard English! After three hundred years, the only thing they left Indians with was an inferiority complex".

No wonder, he warms instantly to an Irish doctor whose tongue doesn't trip over Padmanabhan. "Where was the short apologetic laugh and the summary dismissal of his name, accompanied by that stock standard excuse 'I'll never remember that!' or the variant 'I'm not great at foreign names.'" Not all of Padhman's fears are imagined. After all he does have to cope with Mrs. Fogarty of the corner shop who taps an ice cream carton he picks up and enunciates slowly "keep...in...freezer". This after he has been constantly unburdening himself to her and talking to her about his childhood, his parents, life in Madras etc. There are also his patients who think he speaks Arabic at home and cajole their children to speak to him: "Tell the doctor how you fell off the bike. Go on, he speaks English..." The

irony of it all is captured by his friend's wife Renu's words: "We must be the only country in the world that wallows in pride about the fact that we speak English." She too voices the insecurity of Indians abroad: "And only Indians would take offence so easily—you know, at the fact that others are surprised (that Indians speak English). It's typical of our colonial mentality".

Of course, all this does not stop Padhman from falling in love with an Irish girl, complicating his life further. Both sets of parents are wary of the match and Padhman has to cope with his hysterical mother in Madras and his lover's suspicious mother and brothers in Ireland. But *Paddy Indian* is not just about Padhman in Ireland. It is also about his family back home in Madras. The novel switches back and forth between Dublin and Madras as memories keep returning to Padhman. It is here that the book becomes somewhat weak. The author, Cauvery Madhavan, dwells too much on the humdrum of everyday life in Madras. There are details about Padhman's Amma taking charge of the house and running it after his grandmother dies, close friend Sunil Patel's grandmother keeping an eye on the servants even as she is busy with her prayers. There is no drama in all this, no clue about what makes Padhman the mixed up Indian that he is (after all how much can you blame on colonial mindset?). Come to think of it, why should sitting on a toilet seat be so strange for someone who is described as a highly westernized Indian? Somehow, there is this giggling feeling that all this has been bunged in for a bit of Indian exotica (crowded bazaars, chaotic roads are passe). How else does one explain a whole para on clothes being counted for the *dhobi*. Or a meal which has appams and egg curry, *kheema paratha*, prawn *kurma*, *ghee* rice, ginger-garlic chicken, spinach dal, *paneer tikka* and *boondi raita*, fish pickle, chilli pickle. It does sound a bit confused. The most evocative passage in the sections that deal with Madras is one that is a detailed description of the joys of eating with one's hands. "You could not appreciate the well-rounded ginger-garlic flavour of the slow-fried masala unless you could hold a chicken piece in your fingers and nibble at the meat and suck the spicy gravy out of every groove and crevice in the bones. Cold metal could not mix rice and curry like deft fingers could..."

The weak portions (and the odd clichés) notwithstanding, *Paddy Indian* still makes for an enjoyable and absorbing read. ■

Seetha is a freelance writer.

Treasures from Tribal India

Anand Mahanand

PAINTED WORDS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF TRIBAL LITERATURE

Edited by G.N. Devy
Penguin India, 2002, pp. 302, Rs. 295.00

The adivasis of India have a rich oral tradition: It includes a variety of genres such as songs, lyrics, legends, epics, tales, riddles etc. The oral narratives express their history, rituals, world view, laws, social customs and other forms of cultural practices. There have been attempts made by both colonial and contemporary ethnographers, and writers to document and translate these oral narratives. The works of A.G. Archer, Verrier Elwin, Gopinath Mohanty, Sitakanta Mahapatra, Raghunath Murmu, Tamsula Ao, and Randhir Khare in this regard are noteworthy.

Painted Words: Anthology of Tribal Literature includes excerpts from traditional oral narratives not only of a particular region or a particular tribe, but from a number of tribes and from various parts of our country, from Gujarat to Orissa and from Karnataka to Garhwal. The North-East for some reason is not represented. A significant feature of this anthology is that it not only includes traditional narratives from oral tradition, but excerpts from tribal writers who have gained mainstream education and articulated their experiences in the form of autobiographies. Noted among them are Laxman Mane, Laxman Gaikwad, Kishore Shantabai Kale, Atmaram Kaniram Rathod. Their accounts present the bare reality of the denotified nomadic communities from their own points of view.

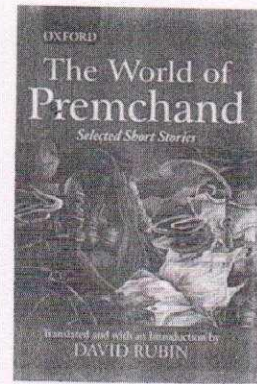
The anthology is not a mere collection of previously published works, but has a number of pieces which are freshly collected. For instance, the lyrics and epics from different tribal languages are fresh and new to the reader. They are musical and rhythmic. The tribal versions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are unique signifying the cultural diversity of our country. More importantly the introduction to the anthology by the author is quite enlightening which shows his long engagement with the tribal world. Above all, the anthology is a fine blend of both traditional tribal oral narratives and narratives grown out of modern consciousness. It will certainly offer the reader an insight into tribal India which is largely unknown. G.N. Devy the editor has a long association with different art forms as also the socio-economic reality of the adivasis of Central India. ■

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Re-reading Premchand

Maya Joshi

THE WORLD OF PREMCHAND: SELECTED SHORT STORIES
Translated and with an Introduction by David Rubin
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 262, Rs. 395.00



How does one respond to yet another reprint of the works of what Alok Rai rightly calls a “hoary icon”, especially when the editor/translator is yet another hoary icon. Recoil one may but such events also provide occasions for refreshing rediscovery. Lost to the younger generation of readers in Hindi and English alike due to curricular over-exposure, perceived as the somewhat morose keeper of a social conscience, tossed between the dialectics of Hindi/Urdu, idealism/realism and sundry political debates, Premchand’s humor, his utter readability, his amazing versatility tend to get lost. Reading Rubin’s book is an opportunity to reread Premchand, to read through the burdensome legacy of canonical worship and the problematic mediation of translation, and face anew the problematics of language, genre, and politics.

Amongst the first Hindi writers to be ‘exported’ to the West; some of the earliest scholarly translations of his work into English have originated abroad. David Rubin’s place within this ‘world of Premchand’ is that of a comfortable old-timer. This volume, first published in 1969, instantly invites that not so odious critical tool: comparison. This second reprint, maintains, for the most, the form and structure of the first edition. But, apart from an interesting new cover, Rubin alters the Introduction to include a useful contextual survey of the modern Hindi short story, while including more stories. Both changes draw attention to the shifting literary-critical positioning of Premchand in the English language. An anthology as authoritative as this certainly helps determine how Premchand gets (re)canonized in the English language.

Rubin divides the collection of 29 stories along what he admits are arbitrary lines: The Village, The Town, and The World. This

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structure, assuming wedges between the rural, the urban and the ‘universal’, is perhaps part of the problem of achieving a just understanding of the writer’s imaginative universe. And I begin with some of these.

Premchand’s earliest work comprised historical/allegorical narratives modelled on legendary stories of heroism and marked by idealistic overstatement and overt emotional appeal. Rubin, following an implicitly ‘modern’ aesthetic model that regards understatement, irony, and indirection as narrative virtues, omits these early stories from his collection. These stories are, to quote Rubin, redolent of a bygone era of “chivalric idealism and noble sacrifice, disguises and amazing adventures.... Of the Urdu *dastans*, the favourite reading of his youth.” (“Introduction” *The World of Premchand*) One can understand Rubin’s evolved sensibility cringing from this genre of story telling: he assumes a predictably evolutionary model whereby Premchand displays “a steady and readily perceptible growth in [his] mastery of the short story,” away from a fiction “with a patriotic or nationalistic bias, tend[ing] toward romantic and melodramatic evocations of heroic exploits...” to later stories that “move past such limitations and achieve a high degree of success when measured by Western standards of that era.” (Rubin, “Introduction”) Of course, Rubin is addressing a western reader, as also perhaps the academic reader in India working with a similar evaluative framework. This editorial policy, however, results in the omission of a crucial strand in Premchand’s writing, one that helps one trace his work through the decades and locate him historically/ideologically.

For this early body of writing comprises a large part of the censored works of Premchand. These include the stories from *Soz-e-Watan*, the stories that he wrote under his original pen-name of Nawab Rai between 1907-8. This, along with his post-1910 work as ‘Premchand’, also proscribed, is available as *Premchand ki Zabti Shuda Kahaniyan* (ed. Balram Aggarwal, Delhi: Manu Prakashan, 2000.) Had some of the stories from *Soz-e-Watan* had been chosen for translation by Rubin, his selection would be able to live up to its intention of being truly representative. The proscription continues in the post-colonial scenario, albeit under the guise of aesthetic acceptability!

Not that Rubin is unaware of the political import of this early writing or of the uses of the chosen mode of narration—a “turning to the past.” In his well-informed introduction he admits that this mode of indirection “provided Premchand along with some of his contemporaries such as Prasad and Nirala, an opportunity to criticize foreign oppression without naming the British...” though clearly, in the case of Premchand, the evasion was unsuccessful.

What these early stories like ‘Ishq-e-Duniya va Hubb-e-Watan’ also reveal is an international strain in Premchand’s engagement with questions of political liberation. Set in 19th century Europe, the story takes as his central character the figure of Mazzini, the nationalist Italian revolutionary hero. This melodramatic and idealized representation is important, if only as an illustration of the degree to which the struggle for freedom in India drew inspiration from parallel events in recent western history—an important polemical strand in secular historiography. Collectively, these omissions manage to create a Premchand who is political but in a peculiarly skewed manner.

Such lapses apart, Rubin’s is a broadly representative collection that captures the surprisingly vast range of narrative modes, stylistic devices and thematic concerns that constitute Premchand’s oeuvre. Pathos and humor, idealism and ironic distance, naturalism and allegory, all are duly represented. Rubin retains the much-anthologized classics of social realism like ‘Pus ki Rat’ (‘January Night’) and ‘Thakur ka Kuan’ (‘The Thakur’s Well’), ‘Dudh ka Dam’ (‘The Price of Milk’) and ‘Mukti Marg’ (‘The Road to Salvation’), while also giving us the slyly subversive ‘Satyagraha’ (‘A Moral Victory’) and ‘Guru Mantra’ (‘A Lesson in the Holy Life’). As if to make up for oversight, he includes here the justly celebrated ‘Shatranj ke Khilari’ (‘The Chess Players’), the brilliant and moving animal fable ‘Do Bailon ki Katha’ (‘The Story of Two Bullocks’) and the astonishingly contemporary ‘Miss Padma’, a “late work” that the crisp, critical end-note informs us, is not acknowledged by Amrit Rai as his father’s

Rubin lauds Premchand's capacity to transcend the particularity of the rural to attain 'universality'— implying freedom from insularity, cultural and linguistic. Premchand's literary biography would seem to bear this out.

work.

The notes have been moved in the revised edition from their original place at the end of each story to the end of the book (never a good idea), with the addition of some useful glosses that explain culture-specific words (certainly a good idea). Some of the notes pack in a good deal of critical exegesis. All stories are identified by their original titles and mention the original date of publication, indicating an intended reader with a professional/scholarly interest. This edition also removes the glossary of Hindi/Hindustani words that the original one had, partly in deference to the fact that many of them are current in the English language—"Brahman", "ghee", "peepul" and "maharaj", for instance—and partly out of a somewhat inconsistently followed practice of replacing them with English equivalents. Which brings up the question of translation.

Rubin lauds Premchand's capacity to transcend the particularity of the rural to attain 'universality'— implying freedom from insularity, cultural and linguistic. Premchand's literary biography would seem to bear this out. Having whetted his literary appetite on a steady dose of literature in translation (Maupassant, Dickens, Tolstoy, Chekov and Marx are recognizable influences) and having himself famously made the shift from one language to another (though Urdu and Hindi could be said to share a family resemblance) Premchand lived to see translations of his work into several Indian languages, including English.

Having said that, one has also to acknowledge Premchand's difficulties with English as articulated in his prose, letters and speeches. Take his speech at the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras, for instance. Premchand's anti-English rhetoric here is overdetermined by nationalist considerations, with English being perceived as a tool of colonial hegemony: "*Hamari pavaadheenta ka sabse apmaanjanak, sabse vyapak, sabse kashor ang Angrezi bhasha ka prabhutva hai...*" ("The dominance of the English language is the most demeaning, the most extensive and the harshest aspect of our subjugation..."). Of course, Premchand's is not an 'intrinsic' rejection of the language. After all, in a story like 'Intoxication' (pp. 215-222), the last

words are given to Ishwari, who scolds his socialist friend in English for his intoxication with new-found privilege. Even so, the statement provides a good point of departure for considering the translational challenges posed by Premchand's writings and of Rubin's strategies for dealing with them.

Angsting over his difficulties with the Bombay film industry, Premchand writes: "*Film mein mere man ko santosh nahin mila... Main jo plot sochta hoon usme aadarshvaad ghos aata hai aur kaha jaata hai usme Entertainment Value (sic) nahin hota... Mujhe aadmi bhi aise mile jo na Hindi jaante hain na Urdu. Angrezi main anuvaad karke unhein katha ka marm samajhana parta hai aur kaam kuch nahin banta...*" ("I did not find satisfaction in films... Whatever plot I think up, idealism enters into it and it is said that it has no entertainment value.... Then the people I run into know neither Hindi nor Urdu. I have to explain the core of the story to them in English and nothing comes of it...." Letter to Jainendra Kumar, 17 Dec., 1930. Quoted in *Premchand Rachna Sanchayan*, Eds. Nirmal Varma and Kamal Kishore Goenka, Sahitya Akademi, 1994, p. 948, my translation). Premchand identifies two of the difficulties that contemporary readers are likely to face — an overdose of idealism and the added anguish of having to encounter this emotionally charged sensibility, the marm, through translation. For Premchand's disaffection was, partly at least, with the inability of the English translation to capture the 'essence' of his writing.

Rubin faces some of these challenges head-on in a prefatory note. He points to the nature of Hindi syntax and idiom and to the peculiarities of Premchand's style. He is extraordinarily sensitive to the nuances of Hindi, especially as spoken by "village people," which tends towards "elliptical, ironic and abbreviated statement." (A Note on the Translation) To his credit, he captures the flavour and cadence of the speech patterns of characters as varied as the rural as Halku and Gobar and the nawabi Urdu of 'Shatranj ke Khilari' without resorting to footnotes—those burdensome translational appendages. The focus is on easy readability for a generalized reader, the non-Hindi reader assumed to possess a vocabulary that includes words such as dharma, sadhu, dhoti, ekka, paan, and puris. Many such words are also explained indirectly, the meaning emerging from the context. This confidence in doing away with a glossary also perhaps points to their inclusion into the English lexicon as well as to a more pro-active involvement on the part of a new breed of foreign reader, located often at universities with a professional interest in Hindi literature.

The translation manages some coups. A delightful touch is the translation of *Guru Mantra*, Premchand's brief and effective expose of the world of bhanga-loving sadhus. The

mantras (not too happily rendered as 'slogans') that these wandering ascetics coin are challenging to translate but Rubin does a creditable job. A sample: 'Fee fi fo fum/ We holy men have finally come./ From now on only fun.' (A Lesson in the Holy Life', p.144) Other such inspired touches include the choice to go literal with idiomatic Hindi: "Neyur went home happy as if God's hand had touched his head" ('Neyur', p. 59) and "As the name, so the man" ('A Desperate Case', p. 95).

Surprisingly, then, a gifted, experienced and self-aware translator like Rubin still manages to fall into the most predictable traps. While earlier reviews have rightly congratulated him on the general ease and fluency of his translation, avoiding the extremes of exoticism on the one hand and a flattened anglicizing on the other, one balks at some of the choices. Food, especially, poses serious problems. When Premchand's delightful gourmand, Pandit Moteram, is made to crave and indulge in such delicacies as "pastry and fudge and rasgoolas" in the holy city of Benaras ('A Moral Victory', p.128) one cringes. Similarly, in 'Man's Highest Duty' people are "gobbling up pancakes and halva" (p.38) during holi while Pandit Moteram salivates over "Jaunpur 'nectars,' Agra 'pearl-drops,' Mathura creams, rasgoolas from Lucknow, rose-apple candy from Ayodhya and Delhi halva" (p.41). Such unintended culinary hybridity has one running to the originals to attempt a decoding. Rubin, seemingly unable to decide whether to leave the originals intact or translate them into an English equivalent for the convenience of a reader alien to the context, settles for a messy compromise. To a reader familiar with the source language context, this certainly leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Some of the transcriptions into the Roman script, too, are phonetically inaccurate — rasgoolas for rasgullas, kichri for khichri, and charpoy for charpai (charpoy being a part of Anglo-Indian vocabulary does not need italics). The spoken dialect acquires a stilt in translation and one wishes that Rubin had tried to capture the cadences of speech a little better. A quick glance at some other available translations, however, restore one's confidence in this one. At least one is spared the likes of "sumptuous viands" that Nandini Nopany and P. Lal give us in their transcriptions ('Price of Milk' in *A Premchand Dozen*, Calcutta:Writer's Workshop, 1983, p. 56).

Some translational losses are, of course, as expected: not only is it impossible to render the significant shifts/ interplay of Urdu and Hindi in Premchand's writing, within any selection from a particular 'phase', the linguistic register varies with characters speaking different dialects according to their class and caste locations. Then there are puns that have to be explained—much of the irony of *Thakur ka Kuan* derives from the play on the two meanings of Thakur-God and the upper caste

landowner. This Rubin painstakingly explains in the notes but other such incidental puns that lend pungency to the original are missed. For instance, when the father-son pair in 'The Shroud' plan to spend on themselves the money they collect from the villagers for Budhiya's shroud, the conversation turns to "dava-daru", seamlessly leading both the men (as well as the Hindi reader) to the steps of the liquor shop, simply because the word for liquor (daru) is contained in the larger compound word for medicine (dava-daru). In Rubin's literal rendering of it as medicine, this is lost.

There are also problems of establishing equivalence for words that carry a heavy historical burden. In 'The Chess Players', for instance, where Premchand refers to a "nawabi zamaana", Rubin's "chivalric age" alters the frame of reference. Especially since the ending acquires a different colour from the original where the two nawabs, who do not shed a tear for their king, choose to lay down their lives for a mere 'shatranj ke wazir' (*Shatranj ke Khilari*, ed. Nirmal Verma, p.99). Premchand charges them with a moral reprehensibility muted by the English version, redolent as it is of medieval knighthood: "They had not shed a single tear for their king but gave up their lives to protect a chess queen" (p.192). The change in gender necessitated by the target language equivalent for the chess wazir alters, however subtly, the tone of the conclusion, giving it a resonance a tad more 'heroic' than the original. Interesting, especially when seen in the light of other translations of this fascinating story such as in Satyajit Ray's film narrative. But this is to digress.

To conclude, in spite of its limitations, Rubin's book continues to be an irreplaceable sourcebook for Premchand's stories in English, if only by default. ■

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Pace of Change

Ira Raja

RAFTAR (PACE)

By Doorva Sahay

Radha Krishna Prakashan, Delhi, 2002, pp. 111, Rs. 125.00

"Not even a skeleton blueprint exists for the narrative of mother-daughter relationships within the master-discourse of Indian fiction", wrote Radhika Mohanram, a New Zealand based academic in 1996.¹ In the past few years, however, what in oral and folk literature were only marginal references to mother-daughter relationships appear to have gained in popularity and treatment within contemporary fiction. Even though Mohanram contends that "the most significant difficulty is not interpretation of texts but location of materials",² it is clear that stories do now exist which thematize mother-daughter relationships. It was while researching this area that I first came across the present collection of short stories by Doorva Sahay, many of which have been previously published in various contemporary Hindi journals of repute, notably *Hans*, a literary monthly edited by the formidable writer and social commentator, Rajendra Yadav.

Doorva Sahay's 'Ma', is an adult woman's first person account of her mother's life, triggered off by the news that she is in hospital following a heart attack. The narrative bond between the daughter, as the teller of the tale, and her mother, as the key subject of her narrative, never translates into a flesh and blood one. The daughter recounts her mother's life with great sympathy and understanding but within the narrative space there is little room for the two to engage with each other as mother and daughter. Unlike a similar Marathi story by Priya Vijay Tendulkar 'A woman Called Aai' which,³ in the tradition of second stage feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theory, characterizes the mother-daughter bond as both powerful and painful at the same time, Sahay's *Ma*, in its refusal to acknowledge an active, manifest emotional engagement between mother and daughter, appears to mirror closely a cultural context in which, as Mohanram observes, the mother-daughter relationship as a distinct category either does not exist, or is not valorized and articulated around familial relationships.⁴

In 'Mausam' (Weather) which addresses, from the viewpoint of the mother, her relationship with her adolescent daughter, the tensions of social change are captured in terms of shifting class aspirations and cultural values. Committed to her well-to-do middle class family with an overtly westernized lifestyle and

sensibilities, this mother seeks to be a friend and companion to her daughter, sympathizing with the emotional turbulence that is generated each time the adolescent girl meets and falls in love with a new boy. The mother tries to understand her daughter through the changes in décor of her room which reflect the changes in her emotional state. The parents' decision to allow their daughter to interact with young boys and to encourage her to discuss with them the aches and pains of her budding love life as a teenager is offered as an index of their progressivism.

Such a story might appear to mark the great distance we have travelled since Giriraj Kishor's 'Choohe' (Mice), a late 1960s story about a middle class family that refuses to grant the growing daughter the social space in which to interact with her male friends. If 'Mausam' measures the distance we have covered since 'Choohe', it also indicates the distance that remains to be covered. The limits of the "modern" mother's liberalism, for instance, are betrayed when she suggests that the daughter's infatuation with a man her father's age is somehow more natural than her own adolescent attachment for her history teacher Miss Rama, an affection that she is quick to attribute to the abnormality produced by an all girls' school.

Another story from this collection, in fact, draws explicit attention to the ways in which cultural norms that govern female sexuality have barely altered since 'Choohe'. Kochi, the eponymous character of this other story, is an adolescent girl who works and lives with a young couple as their domestic help. The story begins with the familiar portrayal of a permanently content lower class character. Kochi's happy and ever smiling face is read as a reassuring guarantee of status quo by her mistress who openly congratulates herself on her good fortune in having found someone as docile and obliging as Kochi. The expectations set up in the opening lines, however, are scuttled soon after. Kochi's smiling face becomes a cause for concern rather than reassurance when the mistress discovers that her husband has been buying her little presents, and she promptly decides to send Kochi away to work with another family. But, as the narrator of the story wonders, "Didn't Kochi have desires? She was also a growing girl. Didn't she want to get married?" Yet, the

fact that Kochi's emerging sexuality is not met with the understanding and indulgence that is Kamini's in 'Mausam' is a further revelation that changed attitudes to female sexuality are anything but uniform across the social graph. Kochi finally returns to her father whom she has always hated but with whom she leaves willingly this time in the belief that he is now a changed man. As a final cruel irony, it is revealed that Kochi's belief that her father has changed is founded on her ignorance of the fact that her new employers have bribed him to take her away.

Attitudes to sexuality, however, don't just vary across gender and social classes; they also vary across age. 'Barish Mein Akele' (Alone in the Rain) tells the story of a widower with a college-going son and daughter, whose desire to remarry causes many eyebrows to rise. Chaudhary sahib does not want to live his life alone but there is little sympathy for his physical and emotional needs which are read as secondary to those of his adult children.

Sahay's collection is an interesting mix of settings and concerns, and, as the ones I have discussed demonstrate, the short story form continues to draw on the shifting mores of contemporary India. Mostly, Sahay writes well. Her eagerness to claim moral victories, however, occasionally oversteps her artistic judgement. 'Remote Control', for example, in presenting the story of three friends, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Christian, reads like a somewhat facile lesson in communal harmony. Occasionally and unwittingly, Sahay also seems to confirm existing cultural stereotypes. Thus, Grace the Christian girl wears "only skirts and minis". Similarly (and predictably enough) for the Muslim family that she wants to marry into, a burqua is a mandatory garment. To some extent such instances can be seen to suggest that the collection mainly reflects the cultural perplexities of the moment rather than point steadily towards a truly liberal social world. But they are few and far between in a collection that is otherwise highly commendable. ■

Reference

- 1 Radhika Mohanram "The Problems of Reading: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Indian Postcoloniality" *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature* ed. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1996) 20-21.
- 2 Mohanram 20.
- 3 Priya Vijay Tendulkar, "A Woman Called Aai" translated from the Marathi by Prachi Deshpande, *Katha Prize Stories* Vol 6 ed. Geeta Dharmarajan and Meenakshi Sharma (New Delhi: Katha, 1997) 105-124.
- 4 Mohanram 21-22.

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Stories of Different Times and Crimes

Kuhu Sharma Chanana

PALNA: A COLLECTION OF THIRTY-SIX SHORT STORIES WRITTEN BETWEEN 1964 TO 1999

By Sunita Jain

Hindi Book Centre, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 187, Rs. 195.00

Palna clearly evinces the writer's intention of probing into the domesticity of Indian and N.R.I. households in order to highlight the subtle nuances and intricacies of women's life. In these stories there is a constant overlapping of the themes of women's exploitation by patriarchal society, the humiliation of the colonized by the colonizers and the harassment of the poor by the rich. Thus, 'feminism', 'post-colonialism', and 'Marxism' can be the key critical tools to analyse this fictional work.

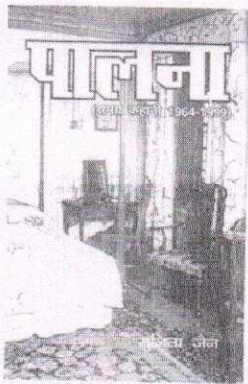
Since, some of these stories were written thirty to forty years back, at times the backdrop appears obsolete and problems extrapolated. However, again the inherent universal appeal of these stories makes them quite absorbing for the readers of all times and climes. The finest example of it is the story, 'Baat' written in 1978 that primarily deals with the plight of an uprooted mother whose tendency of self-immolation is redolent of a 'glorified motherhood', yet another social construction and tool of patriarchal society to subjugate women. Likewise, 'Apradh' written in 1970, movingly tells the plight of a ten year old Black child, who has been stoned by the Whites for the false charge of an eight year old White girl. The clash between the 'Black' and the 'White' is somewhat resolved, but it implicitly if not explicitly, still persists in racial memory and hence quite relevant to the contemporary situation. Similarly the colonial hang-up that persists in the Indian mind is depicted in stories like 'Ram Bachai Hindustani Sai', 'Parvati Kab Roagi' and 'Dwand'. All these stories portrays the denunciation of their own roots and identity by Indians in the process of social mobility and cultural uplift. 'Ram Bachai Hindustani' sarcastically reveals the indifference of Indians towards their compatriots in West.

Another aspect of some of these stories is overlapping of postcolonialism and feminism that draws upon the larger question of the yardstick to judge 'morality' and 'immorality'. One such story is 'Mangla Sutra', which reflects the claustrophobic marital life of two women and their individual methods of overcoming them. Dora, a western woman, unlike Mangla, finds it an easier and better option to walk out of a marriage rather sticking to it in the name of social and personal security. On the other hand, Mangla can never muster a courage to confront her husband due to her traditional upbringing.

The question of 'Female Sexuality' is handled with utmost sensitivity and integrity in the context of cultural constructions in stories, 'Nidan', 'Cleopatra Vah' and 'Pardesh'. In 'Pardesh' a rejected housewife Rupa, gets involved with a somber-looking professor, who turns out to be a Casanova. The traditional Indian conditioning of suppression of sexuality fills her with deep disgust and hatred for her own self and body. She consults a psychiatrist who asks her not to crush her sexual desires because according to him, its rejection could result in severe mental disorders. But her roots and patriarchal conditioning do not allow her to take any step for resolving this conflict, and she remains in dilemma. Through some other stories in this collection, the writer argues that this unresolved conflict is an integral part of the psyche of many Indian women and whenever they want to resolve it they are termed as whores as happens in the case of Renu in 'Cleopatra Vah'.

Another aspect of the life of Indian people living abroad is the problem of job scarcity. Economic insecurity in India compels them to stay abroad despite their Herculean efforts to come back to their native place. Stories, such as, 'Kimar' and 'Kamani', fully explore it. The horrendous effect of economic factors on the lives of various people has been poignantly portrayed in 'Gulama Begum' and 'Coat'. The profound sensitive and in depth study of women's surroundings, social pressure and their impact on the life and mind of women is the central theme of many stories like 'Mohara', 'Paroson jiji', 'Kali Rupa', 'Palna', etc. However, at times the problem

In these stories there is a constant overlapping of the themes of women's exploitation by patriarchal society, the humiliation of the colonized by the colonizers and the harassment of the poor by the rich. Thus, 'feminism', 'post-colonialism', and 'Marxism' can be the key critical tools to analyse this fictional work.



An Impoverished Ghalib

Javed Malick

THE LIGHTNING SHOULD HAVE FALLEN ON GHALIB: SELECTED POEMS OF GHALIB

Translated from Urdu by Robert Bly and Sunil Dutta
Rupa, New Delhi, 1999, pp.146, Rs. 150.00

appears to be overdilated and sinks into sentimentality, but nowhere does the element of didacticism emerge.

Not only thematically but technically also they are well composed and compact. Some of the stories are just one and half pages long, yet are able to convey the profound thoughts in a most emphatic manner. The tone is often somber and sardonic and it lacks the humour which should be one of the key ingredients when the element of humour runs through the whole corpus of this book. Imagery is both stoic and conventional.

As far as, the characterization is concerned, they are life-like but most of them are 'types' instead of 'individual' and lack much needed subtle complexity. Another striking feature of her characterization is that most of her women lack self-reliance and not strong enough to withstand the dominance of the patriarchal society. In fact, they indulge in self-pity and it clearly exhibits a depressing sight, which is in no way a complete and true picture of the present scenario.

The dust jacket of the book is in accordance with the dominant theme that revolves round women, domesticity and their 'combative' and 'symbiotic' relationship. All this is quite explicitly presented on the blurb jacket through the picture of bedroom. ■

Kuhu Sharma Chanana, Lecturer in English at Delhi University and Assistant Editor, *Points of View* (A Biannual Journal in English).

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Translating poetry, it is said, is a metaphysical impossibility. It is certainly so when the original and the translated texts belong to languages as different in their nature and culture as Urdu and English. And of all the Urdu poets, Ghalib is probably the most difficult to translate into a western language. In fact, it won't be an exaggeration to say that his poetry is the translator's nightmare. This is perhaps the reason why, although there have been a number of attempts at English translations and transcriptions of Ghalib (the best known and the most recent one being Ralph Russell's *The Famous Ghalib*), they have usually (and quite sensibly) dealt with selections of verses rather than his entire opus.

Robert Bly and Sunil Dutta's volume, too, contains only a selection of Ghalib's poetry translated into English. However, while a sensitive translator like Russell could translate only selected couplets, Robert Bly and Sunil Dutta had the boldness (or the audacity?) to undertake to translate complete ghazals. The slender, trilingual and strangely titled volume contains thirty ghazals in Arabic and Devanagari scripts along with their English translation. The ghazals are divided into three parts of ten each, although the logic for this division is not explained anywhere. The volume also contains a brief preface by Bly in which he tells us that the translation is the outcome of a protracted and painstaking collaboration between the two authors. Although the final text in English is by Bly, who is himself a poet, it was made possible by Dutta's early drafts which included literal, "awkward and virtually incomprehensible" English translations and detailed explanations of the range of meanings and nuances of each couplet. The volume also includes a brief note by Dutta (who is introduced to us as a biologist and an "Urdu scholar") which deals with the distinctive characteristics of the ghazal form and provides a biographical sketch of Ghalib and an account of his reputation as a poet.

It is difficult to say how well-versed Robert Bly and Sunil Dutta are in Urdu or, for that matter, in the traditions of oriental poetry. The translation they offer here is far less than satisfactory. It is curious that, despite such sustained and painstaking effort as described by Bly, they should come up with a translation which is mostly drab and, prosaic and, at

times, even misleading.

Ghalib's poetry is so rich in resonances of various kinds that a single couplet usually encapsulates a whole world of meaning. For example, he writes:

*Teri nazuki se jana ke bandha hai ahad boda
Kabhi tu na tor sakti agar ustwar hota*

Roughly, this can be translated as: Your delicateness revealed the fragility of the pledge that bound us / For had it been stronger, you could never have broken it. Here, too, "delicateness" is not an adequate substitute for the Urdu *nazuki* or *nazakat*. The latter not only denotes the frailness of the physical body but also the delicateness of movement, gesture, taste, voice, etc., and as such is valorized as an attractive and seductive attribute of the beloved in traditional Urdu poetry. Nonetheless, my rough translation is closer to the original than of Bly and Dutta, who, in their wisdom, translate "nazuki" as "hesitation" and go on to render the couplet thus:

Your hesitation indicates that the thread you tied is weak,
You would never have broken the thread had it been strong.

Again, Ghalib writes:

*Yek nazar besh nahin fursat-e-hasti Ghalib
Garmi-e-bazm hai ek raqse sharer hone tak*
(The lease of existence, Ghalib, is no more than a fleeting moment / The warmth of a gathering doesn't last longer than the dance of a spark.)

Bly and Dutta version reads:

How long is your life? How long does an eyelash flutter?
The warmth of a poetry gathering is like a single spark.

Similarly, Ghalib's famous line: "*Kahte hain ke Ghalib ka hai andaz-e-bayan aur*" ("it is said that Ghalib's style is unique") is translated as "But the experts say that Ghalib's little jests are great." In yet another example, Ghalib's couplet—

*Hamko unse wafa ki hai ummeed
Jo nahi jante wafa kya hai*

—which is remarkable for its tight economy and the shortness of its meter, has been expanded into:

We hope for faithfulness and loyalty from people
But people do not have the faintest idea
what loyalty is.

It is difficult to see why the third person pronoun, which is conventionally read as a reference to the typically unfaithful and hard-hearted beloved, is translated as "people."

It is a measure of the richness of Ghalib's poetry that it often makes several, very different interpretations possible. Bly and Dutta want to see him as a mystical poet in the tradition of Rumi and Kabir. One cannot really object to this for, after all, Ghalib himself refers to his interest in matters of mysticism (*mas'ail-e-tasawwuf*). However, for such an exercise to be truly meaningful it is necessary that it be based on a thorough and profound understanding of both the traditions of Urdu *ghazal* and Ghalib's unique contribution to it on the one hand and of the traditions of the *sufi* and the *bhakti* poetry on the other. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of any such understanding in this volume. In order to foreground the mystical dimension in a verse, all that the translators have done is to replace Ghalib's pronouns *tum*, *tu* and *woh* (you and he/she) with the Great One. This, to my mind, is not only silly but also ruins the flavour of the original. Let me cite an example of what happens to the original because of this interpolation. Ghalib writes:

*Har ek baat pe kahtey ho tum ke tu kya hai
Tumhi kaho ke yeh andaz-e-guftugoo kya hai*

Bly and Dutta render it thus:

Each time I open my mouth, the Great One says: "You-you, who are you"
Help me, how would you describe the style of such a conversation.

Although Bly and Dutta describe their work as "translation", it sometimes reads like an attempt at paraphrase and sometimes at free transcreation. Apart from the basic misreading of the original lines, what is lost in their work is Ghalib's mischievous word-play, wit, humour, irony, the elegance, economy and poetic richness of his verse, as well as the exciting complexity of his thought—in short almost everything that makes Ghalib stand out as a great poet. What Bly and Dutta offer is a one-dimensional, unpoetic, and often incorrect rendering which is likely to leave those readers who cannot read the original wondering what was so great about this Urdu poet.

These "translators" have certainly ruined my Ghalib. ■

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Documenting Discrimination

Sheena Jain

GROWING UP UNTOUCHABLE IN INDIA: A DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By Vasant Moon. Translated from the Marathi by Gail Orvedt; Introduction by Eleanor Zellott
Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. i-xviii+203, Rs. 250.00

Growing up *Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* is not the story of a single individual, but of an entire milieu. The milieu is peopled by a host of characters and charged with the stirrings and upheavals of the Ambedkarite movement. Vasant Moon, a retired civil servant, Dalit activist, and editor of seventeen volumes of Dr. Ambedkar's writings and speeches in English, was born in 1932, and grew up in a 'vasti' or neighbourhood in Nagpur as a member of the Mahar community. In reading this autobiography that spans Moon's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, till the death of his mother in 1992 ('when the 'vasti' let go of me'), we begin to inhabit the Maharpur of Sitabardi and participate in its day to day joys and sorrows, through an honest and lyrical account that describes Moon's personal trajectory through simple vignettes but also documents the weft and woof that textured a local community's strong articulation with the all-India Dalit movement.

Vivid descriptions of the organization and activities of the Samata Sainik Dal (a group of youths founded by Ambedkar for education and protection of Depressed Class activities); of the upheavals caused by the 1935 call for conversion from Hinduism and the 1942 call for a Scheduled Caste Conference; of the dogged resistance of the Dalits to the call of the Quit India Movement; of the heated politics of the 1946 government proclaimed elections; of the agitation caused by Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948; of the charged atmosphere of the ceremony for conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur in 1956; and of the moving funeral of Babasaheb later that year—weave with insights into the everyday ethos of a neighbourhood forged in a culture of mutual help, lively daily exchanges, and colourful personalities.

Thus we are acquainted with wrestling matches and their extraordinary role in overcoming subcaste quarrels; portraits of unassuming, unsung heroes whose lives were dedicated to the cause of the Dalits; the tension, turmoil, and suffering caused by the Hindu-Mahar riots in 1946; the social awakening inspired by the lesser known traditions of ballads and all-night 'qawwalis' that were popular among the Mahar communities of Nagpur; the burgeoning of a Dalit literature exemplified by the painstaking creation of a handwritten journal in Sitabardi

as early as in 1953, contrary to the popular notion of the emergence of Dalit literature only after 1960; and painterly evocations of the simmering heat of summer, the bountiful monsoon, and glowing childhood memories of trees lovingly recalled in all their variety, that were raided for their fruits and nuts on hungry days.

In the midst of all this, Vasant Moon's emergent personality is a combination of restless energy, calm resolve, and buoyancy in the face of enormous vicissitudes. Wrenched out of the protective ambience of his maternal grandfather's care by his death when he was just a child (his father was a rather dissolute man given to drink whom his mother, with her two children, left, to live with her father), the child Vasant grew up in conditions haunted by hunger and poverty. Moon's portrayal of those days is singularly devoid of sentimentality, though not lacking in emotional tones. His mother's search for a job that took her from breaking stones to domestic chores in Parsi homes to working in a mill, and his own occasionally interrupted education till he found a job and completed his M.A., form a story marked by the brilliance of days spent in savouring friendships and sports, energetic participation in the Samata Sainik Dal, and a growing involvement in the cause of Dalit emancipation, including encounters with Babasaheb and Buddhism which were powerful and elevating.

Particularly striking is the way the autobiography takes us through Moon's childhood of hearing stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the community and seeing illusions of ghosts and gods ('they were the same to me') as the herons circled the trees at night to descriptions of religious and other activities of sadhus and godmen that animated the neighbourhood, to the effects of Ambedkar's call for abandoning Hinduism and its rituals, including efforts by Moon and his friends to unveil the chicanery of godmen, and the ultimate embracing of the Buddha's doctrine of compassion. When, as a young

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householder, Moon decides to hurl out of the house the small picture of Saibaba that his mother had added to her 'puja', the effects of an alternative spirituality and faith come across forcefully. There is all this and much more that makes the book a rich source of social history. The ambivalence that marks the local relationship between the Sainik Dal members and the RSS volunteers on matters such as sharing sports grounds and attending each others functions, and the outright hostility between the two on more crucial matters, on the other, documents, for instance, the ground reality of movements that mould youthful aspirations into wider social forces. Here, though, one is somewhat dismayed that Moon simply recounts the use of sexist abuses in the volunteers' altercations without commenting on them. However, other subtle and not so subtle encounters with a culture of discrimination, tempered by relations with nobler individuals, including people in positions of authority such as teachers, often inspired by Gandhi as much as by Ambedkar, are narrated along with reactions of hurt and anger.

Vasant Moon began writing in 1950 when he published a small booklet in reply to a tract maligning Ambedkar's politics. The next was an article called 'When will the Demon of Subcasteism come to an End?'. His autobiography is a skilful work that covers a vast canvas with a combination of passion and simplicity. The translation retains the lyricism of the original, and reads very well. Thoughtfully selected photographs and pictures make it an excellently produced publication, with notes and an introduction which initiate readers both Indian and foreign into a rich world pulsating with the early stirrings of a history that continues to be made. ■

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Gendering an Oral Tradition

Rashmi Pant

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE FOLK SONGS OF GARHWAL HIMALAYAS: A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

By Anjali Capila

Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2002, pp.370, Rs 550.00

This book achieves some success in showing that folk songs are an effective means of communication because they are freely interpolated by the singer to reflect subjective and local experiences. Activists also interpolate within the genre to convey ideas for social change. On other counts the work is theoretically weak. The author relies entirely on a sympathetic and intuitive understanding of the life-experience of Garhwali women. However, such a participant-observer method has not been able to grasp the underlying structures of patriarchy, kinship and peasant economy. The songs cannot be assessed adequately in isolation from the structures within which they arise and from which they take their meaning and efficacy.

The gendering of an oral tradition becomes clear only when the songs are placed in relation to those sung by men, the author however has studied only women's songs. In Garhwal, songs by men are usually sung before an audience of men and women. The *jaagars* or hero songs for example are performed in a public and ritual context. They are accompanied by trances, spirit-possession and consultation of oracles. By contrast the performance of women's ritual songs are given short shrift in Pahari culture.

Of the women's songs collected by Capila only the formulaic life cycle songs, or *mangal geet*, are performed in public. I have observed, that although they evoke auspiciousness and fertility, *mangal geet* seldom hold centre-stage. They form a choral backdrop to some male-centred activity like a pooja, a ritual bath, or the arrival of the bridegroom's party. Even here, the female voices are overshadowed by the frenzied drumming of the Dalit *auji*. These aspects of patriarchal control over public culture could have been observed by the author only in a real performance context. She has relied largely on information volunteered by the singers. Local women would be quite unaware of such a hierarchy and unable therefore to articulate it. Capila has not been able to see how women's voices get marginalized in the public sphere.

Other types of women's songs, less formulaic and more open to interpolation, are sung only before all-female audiences. Those songs that criticize the harsh treatment of the daughter-in-law by her married kinswomen, Capila's informants say, can only be sung

to even more limited audiences, to herself in the privacy of the forest or before female friends of her own age. Women's cultural expressions are thus for feminine or private audiences, while male culture is public and empowered to represent the collective good.

The author ought to have critically differentiated her informants as they come from different positions of privilege in the rural world of Garhwal. The male activists belonging to NGO's speak in images and morality drawn from high religious traditions or from the ecological or socialist politics they espouse. Mothers-in-law, as managers of the peasant household, castigate the daughters-in-law for their fondness for good food and clothes from shops, wasting cash rather than husbanding resources, and, above all, for not working hard enough. Junior kinswomen, such as the daughter-in-law lament the separation from her natal home where they were cosseted, or the absence of a loving husband who has migrated for work. In the book all these voices are simply read side-by-side representing Garhwali women as a unified subject. But the voices recorded by the author are partial, they take different sides depending on the narrator's location in the social structure according to age, kinship hierarchy, and gender.

In the patriarchal scheme of things the daughter-in-law can get approval only by uncomplainingly accepting the poor food and heavy share of household and agricultural tasks she is given. That is the image of the woman of Garhwal valorized in the discourse of the male activists and by the mother-in-law persona in the songs. On the other hand, the remembering-songs, or *khuder geet*, can be read as contestations of this patriarchal world. The ones collected by Capila, complain of the harshness of the *sasural*, or married home, and long for the natal home, calling on the mother, brother, and father to call her home. The work of William Sax on Garhwal and Lynn Bennett's on Nepal shows that in hill cultures ties with natal relatives are reinforced through rituals, gifts and visits between the two households.

Feminist anthropologists, Marilyn Strathern for example, have shown that women in many cultures nurse relations with their maternal kin even after they are married. This helps them to put up a resistance to, and

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to negotiate with some clout, vis-à-vis their husbands and other married kin. Perhaps the genre of remembering-songs, collected by the author may be seen as a contestatory feminine genre within an overall patriarchal culture. Some *khuder geet* are addressed to the absent husband. This kind of celebration of conjugal love has been interpreted by Raheja and Gold as subversion of the husband's solidarity with patrilineal kin. The author has placed remembering-songs in a category of songs depicting "Social Relations" where they are differentiated from songs representing "Work Roles and Activities Performed", and those representing "Dissent Protest and Social Change". To my mind remembering-songs are equally about work and dissent although they turn upside down the patriarchal family's notions of work and the social or political activists' notions of protest.

Contemporary theoretical debates in anthropology, and the social sciences in general, focus on ways of understanding the relationship between structure and the subjective practice of men and women. The book under review reminds us yet again, that social and discursive structures cannot be grasped only through inter-subjective interactions between the anthropologist and her subjects, however great the empathy she might bear towards them. ■

ENDNOTES

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Mystical Worldview

Meenakshi Khanna

LOVE'S GLORY: RE-CREATIONS OF RUMI

By Andrew Harvey

First published in the US by Balthazer Books and North Atlantic Books, 1996, and Viking, Delhi, 2002, pp. xi+110, Rs. 195.00

Mysticism as a variety of religious experience in Islam is commonly known as Sufism.

The figure of Mawlana Jalaluddin Balkhi, known as Rumi, towers above the mystics of Islam. Jalaluddin was born in the city of Balkh in Afghanistan in AD 1207. His family was forced to flee Iran, before the advancing hordes of Chenghiz Khan, and finally sought refuge under the Sejukids of Rum (Asia Minor) in Anatolia. Later Jalaluddin settled in Konya, which sheltered scholars, artists and mystics from the Eastern Islamic world that was devastated by the Mongol onslaught, and died there in AD 1273. For his long sojourn in Turkey Jalaluddin is known by the sobriquet of Rumi. But his followers know him as "Mawlana" which means "our master" as he inspired a distinct order of Sufis, the Mevlevis, known in the West as the Whirling Dervishes. The hypnotic motion of the Mevlevi dance accompanied by the singing of Rumi's verses attracted the attention of the early Orientalists who chose Rumi's poetry for translation some two hundred years ago.

Rumi's profound mystical worldview and the creativity of his infinite imagination is rendered into exquisite Persian poetry in about fifty thousand verses set in the metre of *ghazal*, *masnavi* and *rubai* forms. Most of these verses

speak of the poet's love for God and love for everything in this world – because everything can serve as a symbol for higher truth, which will finally obliterate it. The ultimate goal of humanity, according to Rumi, is union with God through love.

During the last few decades, when love for Rumi became fashionable in certain circles in the West, publications by non-scholars have emphasized Mawlana's role as a timeless, spaceless ecstatic master of Love. This is often misleading as it removes Rumi from the reality of his historical context. Andrew Harvey's selection of 108 poems from miscellaneous sources (vaguely identified as "a plethora of translations in different languages") of reworked translations of Rumi is a typical example. Harvey's purpose is indeed noble as he seeks to rectify the "worldwide crisis we find ourselves in" and work to "preserve the planet" by knowing the "vision of our real divine nature" by following Rumi's "Way of Passion" (phrases within quotes are from Harvey's Introduction). Harvey's solution for the anguished humanity will certainly distress an informed reader of Rumi. ■

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A Santoor Maestro

Abhik Majumdar

JOURNEY WITH A HUNDRED STRINGS: MY LIFE IN MUSIC

By Shiv Kumar Sharma and Ina Puri

Viking, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 193+xiii, Rs. 395.00

Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma has been one of Hindustani classical music's more controversial figures. His detractors claim that the Santoor, his favoured musical instrument, lacks certain features essential for Raga elaboration. They are quick to dismiss him as an upstart, and more of a showman than a serious musician. His admirers, on the other hand, hail him as a great innovator, one who dared to defy humdrum conventionality and achieve something truly out of the ordinary.

The present book performs a much-needed service. It puts forward his views on the foregoing debates as well as other, more general matters, and that too in a manner comprehensible to a lay reader. For these reasons, it is certainly a welcome addition to the literature on Indian classical music.

Panditji has narrated his story to Ina Puri, leaving the actual writing work to the latter. Hence the reader tends to receive the account somewhat at second hand. However, this does not hinder the even rhythm of the book.

The book comprises twenty-three chapters collated into seven parts. It begins with a brief family background, followed by a portrayal of Shiv Kumar's early life. His upbringing in idyllic Jammu, his father's deep influence on him, his school life (and mathematical ineptitude!), and his training, on both the Tabla and the Santoor are all depicted with vivid clarity. Shiv Kumar's growth as a musician, his immediate environment, and the prevalent social and political environment all intertwine in this narrative. The Partition and its aftermath are juxtaposed with his early experiments with the Santoor.

Panditji's early professional life was fraught with difficulties. His endeavour to establish himself as an artiste was compounded by his equally protracted struggle to get the Santoor recognized as a classical instrument. The proficiency on the Tabla that he had acquired became at once a source of livelihood and a temptation of sorts; people kept advising him to concentrate on it instead of wasting his time on the Santoor. Others told him to take up some other instrument like the Sitar. One person even suggested he become a film actor! Then again, the film world posed another dilemma whether to go over to it completely as a performer or music composer, or to stick to classical music.

One whole chapter of the book is devoted to the Santoor. Since its genesis lay in the Sufiana music of Kashmir, in its original form it was not equipped to handle the complexities

of Indian classical music. Panditji had to take considerable pains to recast the Santoor into the classical mould. Of particular interest is the way he improved its tonal quality, and especially his quest for the elusive *meend* or glide, which many consider essential for classical music.

His marriage coincided with the Santoor's gradual acceptance as a classical instrument. A settling-down process thus marked the next phase of his life. A sense of fulfilment in his family life complemented steady concert bookings and other engagements. Maestros Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Brijbhushan Kabra, Allah Rakha and Zakir Hussain, friends from the days of struggle, became full-fledged musical partners as well. Stretching the boundaries of classical music has always interested him. He was among the pioneers in its propagation in the western world. Then again, he is not only one of the most frequently recorded classical musicians, but also actively participated in experiments like *Call of the Valley* and *Music of the Mountains*. In tandem with Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia, he has also had a successful stint as a composer of film music.

The last parts of the book are dedicated to his views on musical pedagogy, the future of Indian music, and his world-view in general. It touches upon subjects as diverse as Panditji's experiences with teaching his son, organizations like the ITC Sangeet Research Academy and SPIC-MACAY, and the menace of religious intolerance.

The book delicately balances the need for simplicity with the technical nature of the subject matter, indulging the latter only when absolutely necessary. Students of music may not find it meaty enough. But then, the book is clearly targeted at the lay reader rather than the *cognoscenti*.

Interesting facts and anecdotes abound throughout. Few know, for example, that Shiv Kumar Sharma had played the Tabla for the song *Piya vose naina lage* in the film *Guide*. Or about the time in London when he and his friends, much to their dismay, were made to stay at the house of some middle-aged ladies. So Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia posed as a drug-addict and scandalized the hosts into throwing them out.

Laudably, Panditji does not shy away from controversies. His concerns about the growth of communalism and saffronization, his relations with other artistes like Pts. Jasraj and Hari Prasad Chaurasia, and his distaste for empty



showmanship and unhealthy competition, for example, have been set out in a forthright and yet restrained manner.

Unfortunately, Puri does not seem to have paid sufficient attention to technical and factual details. The book contains several unfortunate errors. Other reviewers have noted that Raga Vachaspati turns into Vanaspati, and *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* becomes 'Vasudeva kutum bakum'. A careful reading elicits more such blunders. Raga Rageshwari is rendered as Rajeshwari. Shudh (sic) and Tivra swaras are both willy-nilly described as the equivalent of the western sharp. The novel *Guide* is credited to Pearl S. Buck. And is the Dilip Chaturvedi referred to actually Dilip Chandra Vedi?

Moreover, it neglects some crucial biographical details, even something so obvious as Panditji's date of birth. All we can glean from the text is that he was nineteen in 1947 and twenty-two in 1960, which doesn't exactly help matters. The second date is consistent with most other events mentioned (such as his sixtieth birthday celebrations held in 1998). On the other hand, Panditji recalls listening to Ustads Inayat Khan and Abdul Karim Khan on the radio in his childhood. Unless these were broadcasts of previously recorded recitals, Panditji would have had to be born much earlier than 1938 to listen to them. Ustad Abdul Karim Khan died in 1937 and Ustad Inayat Khan in 1938.

The get-up of the book is excellent. The printing is superb, as is its overall finish. Manjit Bawa's sketches lend an interesting touch. It could have done with an index and glossary, though.

All in all, Puri does justice to the tough remit before her. Writing about a classical musician inevitably compels digressions into musical technicalities. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma's approach to music is unconventional to the point of being off-beat. Given all this, presenting his story for the lay reader is surely a tricky job. And Puri manages to do so without either resorting to oversimplifications or getting bogged down in details. Hence, notwithstanding minor lapses, it is definitely a worthwhile effort, besides being a pleasant enough read as well. ■

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Placing Chopra on to the Playground of World Cinema

Subhajit Chatterjee

YASH CHOPRA : FIFTY YEARS IN INDIAN CINEMA

By Rachel Dwyer

Roli Books, Lotus Collection, 2002, pp.256, Rs.450.00

Rachel Dwyer's recent publication on Yash Chopra is perhaps the only extensive study conducted on the celebrated popular filmmaker till date. While there have been some writings on Yash Chopra's films in contemporary academic publication on Indian cinema, Dwyer for the first time places a contemporary mainstream Indian filmmaker on to the playground of 'World Cinema'. A version of this book has been published by BFI as a part of its series on World Directors that includes intellectual stalwarts like Lars Von Trier, Emir Kusturica, Shyam Benegal et al.

By Dwyer's own account the book is the 'first research-based academic study of a contemporary top Indian director.' Considering the detailed sketch of Chopra's early life, film career, informative account of the making of each of his films and array of quotations from interviews, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Dwyer's research but the book's claim to an academic insight could be contested by many academicians unless one uses the term 'academic' in a considerably broader sense than usual. The book does not articulate any consistent or original argument on Chopra's aesthetics, popular cinema in general or any particular aspects of the artist's work except in the last section where the author joins issue with M. Madhava Prasad's argument on the context of film production in India. The rest of the book traces Chopra's professional career often substantiating several observations on his work by referring to arguments and theoretical concepts such as Arjun Appadurai's 'vernacular globalization', 'community of sentiments' or Madhava Prasad's notion of 'darshana' as a representational economy of looking.

The short foreword by Lata Mangeshkar sets the tone of the book which primarily attempts to give its potential readers an insight into the public and private life of a successful filmmaker and businessman to reveal the disciplined, creative artist. No wonder the book is full of quotes that are mostly professional or personal reminiscences, laced with a touch of intimacy. For example, a lot of stress is given to the fact that the professional colleagues in Chopra's cinematic world often use modes of address that ought to be reserved for familial or personal encounters. The interesting point is that Dwyer's narrative seems to interpret

such a mode of professional relationship as the obverse of western professional codes and also as the secret of the success of Chopra's productions over an enormous range of time.

After a short autobiographical preface regarding the empirical context of the research the author goes on to a cursory biographical study of Chopra's socio-cultural background and his entry into the world of cinematic production as an assistant to his charismatic elder brother B.R. Chopra, who is a dazzling cinema magnet in his own right. But throughout the account the narration maintains a disturbingly 'neutral' tone even while describing issues like the family's links to Arya Samaj and Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) or while speculating on their encounter with the devastating event of Partition. After the B.R. Chopra's settlement and the inauguration of his production unit in Bombay, Dwyer goes on narrating a fairly detailed account of Yash's work as an assistant and directorial ventures lucidly focusing on each film separately.

Dwyer divides his account of Chopra's career as a director into five major sections starting from his early apprenticeship to his first directorial venture *Dhool Ka Phool* and ending with contemporary 'Romantic Films' which launched his young son Aditya's career and have gained a vivid 'transnational' appeal. The other three sections deal with the founding of Yash Raj films (focusing on *Daag* and *Joshila*), 'the Amitabh Bachan films' which is considered as his most distinctive contribution and 'The Lean Years' which focuses on his less successful films of the 80's such as *Mashaal*, *Faasle* and *Vijay*. The narrative concludes by some important reflections on the development of an increasingly homogenous mode of control over all aspects production by the Chopra family and team, which according to the author is the evident outcome of the working techniques of the filmmaker. The book ends with an appendix which contains Yash Chopra's own comments on various aspects of filmmaking and other filmmakers and comments on Yash by various luminaries of the film industry like Mahesh Bhatt, Amitabh Bachan or Sridevi to artists and critics such as M.F. Hussain and Iqbal Masud.

Intertwined throughout the narrative of Yash Chopra's professional career and artistic evolution are Dwyer's own comments that

Central to Dwyer's observations is of course Chopra's successful blending of traditional cultural sensibilities with the changing contours of Indian socio-economic scenario representing a successful negotiation of globalizing forces.

attempt to theorize Chopra's use of thematic and aesthetic sensibilities of Indian popular culture. Central to Dwyer's observations is of course Chopra's successful blending of traditional cultural sensibilities with the changing contours of Indian socio-economic scenario representing a successful negotiation of globalizing forces. This argument sometimes resonates the 'consuming modernity' theses on cultural consumption that has in recent times gained considerable foothold. Thus one can find numerous implicit references to the idea of a superficially changing but essentially deep seated 'cultural difference' of the Indian psyche that animates influential works of social psychology. However Dwyer refrains from a simplistic application of the Indian theories of the 'rasa' to interpret the popular cinematic representations, preferring Bordwell and Carroll's 'cognitive' approach as a more appropriate critical tool. On the other hand one can argue that Dwyer's use theoretical perspectives on globalization and popular culture borrowed from scholars like Appadurai remain superficial and require more elaborate exposition to be convincing. Many contemporary studies on popular cinema or music in relation to diasporas and ethnicity do reveal that the 'transnational' is a more complicated concept having more intricate and conflicted socio-political resonances than that is apparent at first glance.

It must be noted, however, that even with its weaknesses the book should provide a valuable ground material for further academic work in the field of social psychology or cinema studies in general. It has to be admitted that academicians dealing with rigorous theory often use accounts like Dwyer's as their primary or secondary material without always acknowledging the research labour that goes into production of such works. ■

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Improving Reflections

Bill Aitken

PRADAKSHINA: TRAVELS IN INDIA

By Madhoor Kapur

Bluejay Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 283, Rs. 195.00

For any artist to switch medium invites some risk. For an acclaimed painter like Madhoor Kapur the risk is magnified because the reader will expect his prose to be as bold and colourful as his canvases. Pradakshina signifies an auspicious circuit and one of the less known meanings of its root 'dakshina' is "a lover who is equally courteous to several mistresses". The author succeeds in courting some 21 destinations in the subcontinent though his favours may be uneven. Bhimbetka merits one page while Konarak demands forty. What sets this book apart from the usual travelogue is the author's concern to extract the essence of his encounter and ignore the nitty gritty of historical background and geographical location. Immediate in their appeal most of the essays are well-honed recollections of vintage travels delivered in a contemplative mode that ranges from the euphoric beatitudes of a traveller topped up on his preferred means of self-transcendence to the inspired critique of a professional aesthete. The trouble with so much benevolence and belief in the oneness of life's flow is that it ignores the ocean of Samsara's propensity to drown us! Is the sea merely an emotion? The author asks. Speculation proves easier than finding an answer.

Aimed at a universal audience the book

seems elitist by the accident of being written in English. The author believes rural pilgrims anyway understand what he is getting at, but I would prefer to have that corroborated by a social scientist. The author's style of writing is reminiscent of Krishnamurthi's *Commentaries on Living* where a hauntingly beautiful vignette of Nature is enlarged upon by the hypnotic technique of accumulating associations. However the effect of piling up descriptive phrases can lead to reader fatigue since nothing political, judgemental or salacious is allowed entry.

Unlike painting writing needs a punch-line. Profundity can collapse into banality and the Andamans can soon begin to sound just like Lakshadweep. The cultural core of Karnataka certainly deserves to be distinguished from Deep in the Heart of Texas ("it is very hot in the day but the stars at night are large and bright"). If the vibrant palette is missing at least each essay is prefaced by Madhoor's authentic signature: line-drawings of astonishing virtuosity that effortlessly capture the sinuous grace of that India lost beneath the sleaze of civic malfeasance and overwhelmed by the stink of sewage. The artist pilgrim is at his best when face to face with the jewels of his Hindu heritage viewed at the Shore Temples,

Halebid and Khajuraho. "The temples rise merely thirty feet and yet evoke a magnificence that much larger buildings fail to do" he notes at Mammalapuram: "One does not need enormity to praise God, one needs but purity". Of Hoysala art he believes (sufficient to silence my own reservations) "The heightening of aesthetic sensibility soars with an unparalleled intensity of vision: the elaborate carvings have turned stern rock to delicate ocean spray with the wand-touch of the chisel". Likewise at Kailasnath (Ellora) he praises the sheer virtuosity of the concept and the immense labour of love that its hewing involved: "The unswerving bhakti of seven centuries leave this imperishable testament to the human soul". Clearly Kapur's own labour of love is for the connoisseur who knows the monuments well and has no need to enquire into the price of a hired bicycle. (The author in fact does ride a bike around Konarak—not easy going in view of the sand.) *Lonely Planet* travellers may be put off by the author's advaitic unconcern for money and will not share his narcissistic caste Hindu notion that the priests at Puri share Lord Jagannath's welcome to his *darshan*. Kept at a distance from the deity, foreign visitors are nonetheless shamelessly pestered for their dollars. Fittingly for his *pradakshina* the culminating moment arrives in the circuit's *garbhagriha*, the centre of the mysteries. This has to be at Khajuraho where the ecstasy of Lord Shiva's marriage celebrations spill over into Indian civilization's most remarkable insight about the nature of the divine. ■

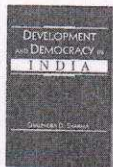
Bill Aitken has written travel books on India's rivers, mountains and railways.



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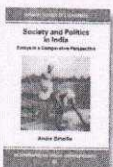
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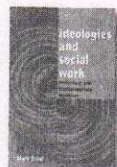
This book deals with the urges and aspirations of some ethnic communities to acquire, through socio-political movements, some measure of control over societal resources like political power, economic endowment and social status. In this book, the Indian Constitution is visualised as an architecturally multi-faceted modern edifice of accommodative versatility. What lends the book a unique and authentic flavour is the fact that the author has been an active participant in Jharkhand, Bodo and Naga movements on both sides of the divide—officially on the authority's side but emotionally and morally on the protagonist's side.

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