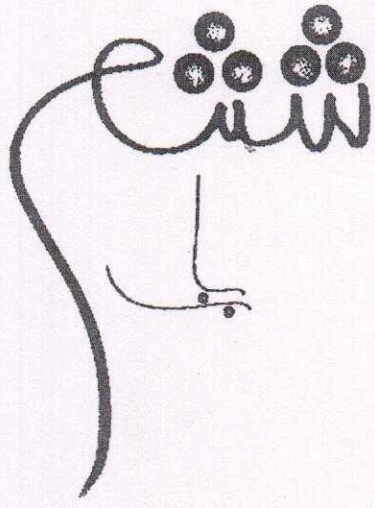
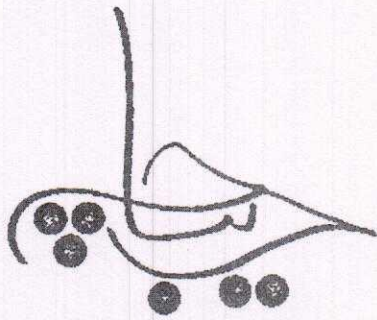
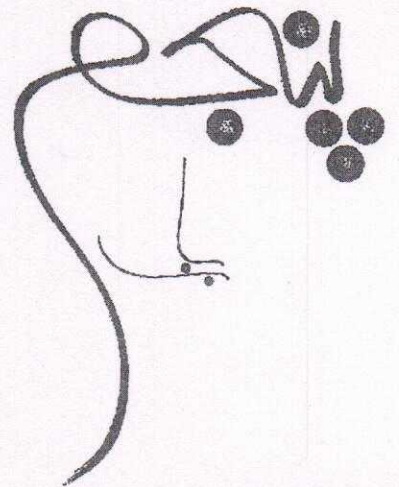
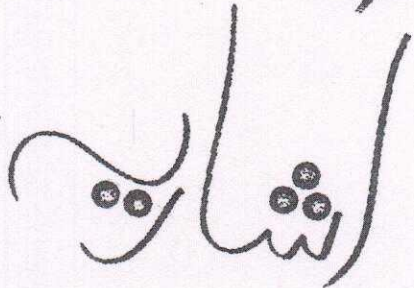
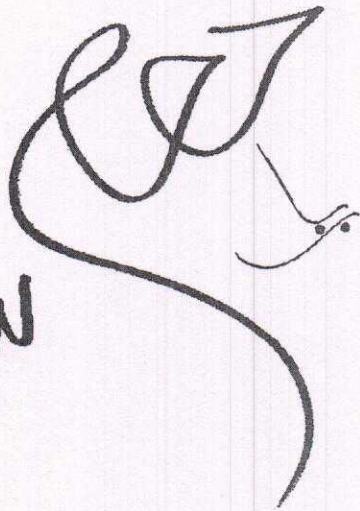
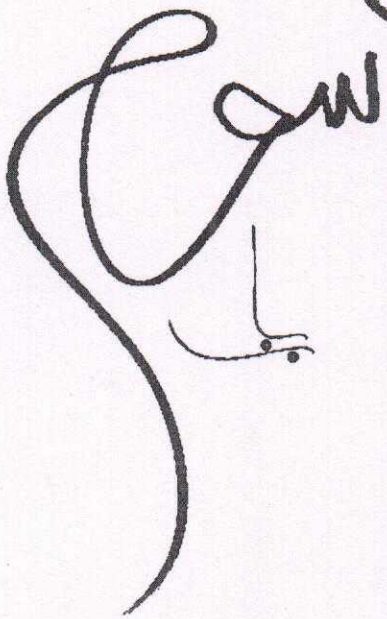
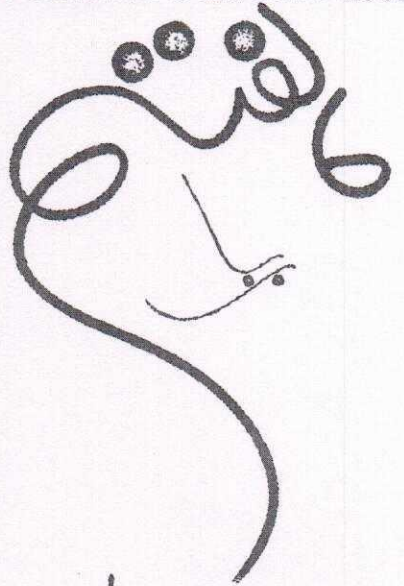
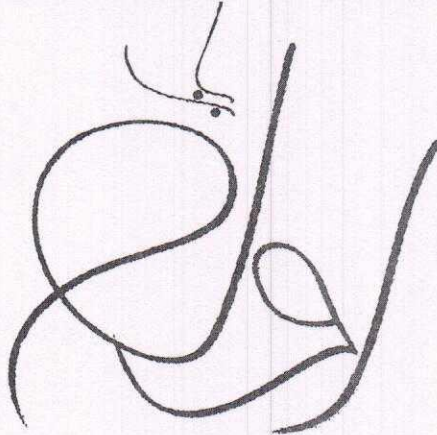
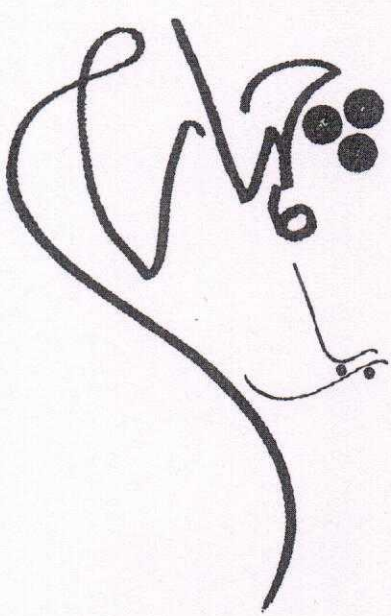


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# Lamb's Tales of Kashmir

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta

INCOMPLETE PARTITION : THE GENESIS OF THE KASHMIR DISPUTE 1947-48

By Alastair Lamb

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. 373, Rs. 595.00

Oxford University Press has brought out this new edition of Lamb's 1997 work, originally published by Roxburgh Books. The Preface explains that in the new edition "a number of minor errors (nearly all typographical) have been corrected" but the "text has otherwise been left unchanged."

*Incomplete Partition* is essentially an elaboration of the thesis outlined in Lamb's earlier works, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy* (1991), and *Birth of a Tragedy: Kashmir 1947* (1994). The book falls into three tenuously connected parts, dealing respectively with the Partition process, the struggle for Kashmir in 1947-48 and the possible lines of a resolution of the Kashmir issue.

The principal theme in Lamb's account of Partition is that a "communal fault-line" ran from south to north through the province of Punjab, continuing "northwards right through the State of Jammu & Kashmir up to the crest of the Karakorum range and the border with Chinese Sinkiang". To the west of this line lay Muslim-majority areas, while to the east lay areas where Hindus or—in the case of Ladakh—Buddhists were in a majority. Punjab was partitioned along the "communal fault-line" but not the princely State of Jammu & Kashmir. This "incomplete partition" of India "guaranteed future trouble". The staple fare of Pakistani publicity—that Kashmir should have gone to Pakistan on account of its Muslim majority—is thus served up garnished with a geological metaphor.

It would be unfair, however, to characterize Lamb's account of Partition as nothing more than an elegant restatement of the Pakistani case. No less than fifty pages—the greater part of the section dealing with Partition—are devoted to a detailed study of the Radcliffe Award. Lamb points out that as early as in February 1946, Wavell proposed that Gurdaspur district, where Muslims accounted for just over fifty percent of the population, should go to India in the event of Partition on account of its significance to the Sikhs. Lamb observes that there never was any question of the Radcliffe Commission awarding the three eastern tehsils of Gurdaspur to Pakistan. Thus, the "Radcliffe Award was not devised by Mountbatten, as many in Pakistan believe, expressly to guarantee India a more convenient access to the State of Jammu & Kashmir."

Turning to the affairs of the princely State of Jammu & Kashmir in 1947, Lamb indulges in some expansive speculation about Mountbatten's role. In later years, Mountbatten

revealed that he had hoped that the State would accede to Pakistan. Lamb brushes this aside, alleging that the Governor-General had colluded with Nehru to secure the Maharaja's accession to India. He suggests that during the Governor-General's visit to Srinagar in June 1947, Mountbatten "may well have tried" to use the Radcliffe Award in an "extremely oblique" manner to sway the Maharaja's decision. What "seems to have happened", according to Lamb, was that "it was hinted in various indirect ways that the Maharaja's sole prospect of surviving as a Prince was to tie up in some manner with India...If all of Gurdaspur went to Pakistan, of course, the Maharaja would be doomed." In order to prevent this, "so the whispers had it," the Maharaja had to accede to India. "Otherwise...Sir Hari Singh would be left to the tender mercies of M.A. Jinnah." Not a shred of evidence is cited for this lurid tale of "hints" and "whispers"!

The evidence, such as it is, actually points in the opposite direction. Consider the following facts. First, in June 1947 it was far from clear that a decision to accede to India would prove viable, since the Radcliffe decision on Gurdaspur still lay in the future. (It was announced only after August 15.) Pressing the Maharaja to take a decision before Independence Day—which was Mountbatten's stated intention—amounted to stacking the cards in favour of Pakistan. Second, Mountbatten informed the Kashmir authorities about Sardar Patel's assurance that India would raise no objection if the State decided to accede to Pakistan. The Governor-General did not convey a corresponding assurance from the Muslim League leadership. Finally, Mountbatten handed over to Prime Minister Kak a copy of a memorandum prepared by Nehru which, while setting out the case for the State's accession to India, emphasized that Kashmir's destiny must be guided by Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference. It was precisely this prospect of handing over power to Abdullah that made it so difficult for the Maharaja to accede to India. Hari Singh knew that Jinnah would offer more generous terms to his dynasty. The Governor-General could hardly have done more within the bounds of propriety to point the Maharaja in the direction of Pakistan!

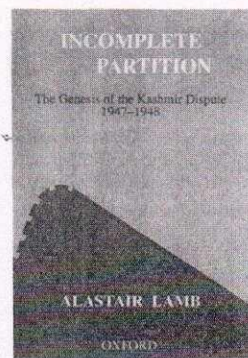
Lamb questions India's claim to a superior legal status in Jammu & Kashmir by advancing two propositions. He argues, firstly, that the tribal invasion of October 1947 was "part

of a local rebellion", carried out not by "raiders" but "insurgents" or "rebels". In his view, India and Pakistan intervened in support of rival sides in what was essentially a civil war in progress in the State. Lamb is right in pointing out that the conflict in Poonch originated as local unrest against extortionate taxation (though it soon came to involve clandestine Pakistani participation on an increasing scale). The tribal invasion of the vale of Kashmir was in no sense a part of the Poonch uprising. Not even the Pakistani leaders of the invasion force have claimed the status of "rebels" for the Pathan tribesmen who poured into Kashmir from across the Pakistan border. Thus Akbar Khan's memoir is accurately titled "Raiders in Kashmir".

Secondly, Lamb elaborates a thesis presented in his previous book, *Birth of a Tragedy*. He maintains that the Maharaja did not in fact sign the Instrument of Accession before the entry of Indian troops into the State. He seeks to answer the arguments advanced by Prem Shankar Jha against this thesis but we have probably not heard the last word in this debate.

To the present reviewer it seems that the precise date on which the document was signed is of little significance. Mahajan's memoirs and other documents establish beyond a shadow of doubt that the Maharaja was anxious to accede to India as early as in September but hesitated to do so only because of Nehru's insistence on the condition that Abdullah be brought to power. There is thus no ground for maintaining, as Lamb does, that "if it [signature of the Instrument of Accession] in fact took place after the Indian intervention, then it could well be argued that it was either done under Indian duress or to regularize an Indian *fait accompli*." We know from the archives that it was only Mountbatten who insisted that accession must precede military intervention, believing that this would prevent the outbreak of an interdominion war. Nehru and Patel were quite clear that even without prior accession, India had every right under international law to respond to an appeal for assistance from a friendly State which was the victim of aggression.

In his heyday as an historian Lamb was the author of standard works on British policy in Central Asia. Readers will recollect with nostalgia the meticulously researched and



referenced works of his earlier days. In 1984, with *Birth of a Tragedy*, Lamb made a startling departure from a well-established convention. He ceased to reveal the documentary sources on which his narrative was based, promising only to reveal these in a later work. These sources have yet to be unveiled! In the book under review, Lamb continues to keep his documentary sources under purdah, with the teasing hint that, though he does not cite specific references for documents, he has "given their dates and made it clear that they are to be found in the British archives and broadly where" so that the diligent researcher would be able to run them to earth.

Unfortunately, contrary to this claim, Lamb often fails to provide any clue at all about his sources. When he does provide a clue that can be followed up, it often proves difficult to reconcile his conclusions with the text of the document seemingly under reference. We have already noted his failure to cite any source in support of his contention that the Maharaja was encouraged to accede to India through "hints" and "whispers" inspired by Mountbatten. A couple of other examples will suffice to illustrate the game of hide and seek which Lamb plays with documentary sources.

Lamb gives a detailed, if inaccurate, account of the proceedings of the Defence Committee of the Indian cabinet on 25 October 1947, following receipt of information about the tribal invasion. He refers in passing to "accounts of this Defence Committee meeting which have come to us (*perhaps* by way of Mountbatten's own archives)..." [emphasis added]. The Mountbatten archives do, in fact, include a copy of the minutes of the meeting of October 25 and it is difficult to see on what other basis Lamb could have provided a detailed account of the discussions. But it is equally difficult to fathom why he should indicate uncertainty about the provenance of the document if he had seen it, as appears to be the case.

The issue is further confused by obvious discrepancies between the minutes and the account given by Lamb. As we noted earlier, Lamb suppresses the fact that Patel and Nehru maintained in the meeting that India would be fully justified under international law in coming to the Maharaja's aid in response to his appeal, *even if this was not preceded by accession*. Lamb writes that Mountbatten's argument for prior accession was dismissed by Nehru as "excessive concern for constitutional niceties." Here is what the minutes actually say:

"The Deputy Prime Minister said that he did not consider there was anything to prevent India sending armed assistance whether or not Kashmir acceded. If a friendly State asked for such help, surely it could be provided. The Prime Minister agreed that there could be no legal objection to sending armed assistance if it was at the request of the State."

Again, commenting on Nehru's telegram of 25<sup>th</sup> October to Attlee, Lamb concludes: "The

implications of the 25 October telegram seemed clear enough. The Indians were going to go slow on the State of Jammu & Kashmir accession question, thus leaving the settlement of the final sovereignty of the State as a whole, or of its constituent parts, as a matter for inter-Dominion negotiation, and, indeed, prior to the opening of such negotiation they might also refrain from military intervention."

The text of Nehru's telegram can be conveniently found in the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (Second Series), Volume 4*. Nowhere does it suggest that the future of the State of Jammu & Kashmir was a matter for inter-Dominion negotiation. What Nehru said was that the "question of accession in any disputed territory or State must be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people... It is quite clear, however, that no free expression of the will of the people of Kashmir is possible if external aggression succeeds in imperilling the integrity of its territory." Far from implying that India would refrain from military intervention until negotiations had been held with Pakistan, Nehru made it clear that an act of aggression had taken place, that an "urgent appeal for assistance" had been received from the Kashmir Government, that "we would be disposed to give favourable consideration to such request from any friendly State", that the security of Kashmir is "vital to the security of India," that "helping Kashmir is an obligation of national interest to India", and that "we are giving urgent consideration to the question as to what assistance we can give to the State to defend itself."

Lamb throws up some truly interesting ideas after he doffs the historian's cap.

The last part of the book, outlining a possible settlement of the Kashmir issue, appears to mark a major evolution in his thinking. Lamb suggests that "both Azad Kashmir and the Vale might be declared autonomous regions, each with its internal self-government but with defence and external relations in the hands of Pakistan in the case of Azad Kashmir and India in the case of the Vale." In this scheme, the Northern Areas would opt for incorporation in Pakistan and Jammu and Ladakh in India. "No territory under Indian control would be transferred to Pakistan and no territory under Pakistani control would be transferred to India. The existing cease-fire line (Line of Control) would become the accepted border, either between India and Pakistan or between Azad Kashmir and the Vale." While we may find fault with details of the proposition – for instance, with regard to the degree of 'autonomy' of the Vale – there can be no question that the broad approach is thought-provoking and that it merits serious consideration. ■

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

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# Narrating the Great Divide

Malini Sood

## PANGS OF PARTITION: THE PARTING OF WAYS, VOLUME I

Edited by S. Settar and Indira Baptista Gupta  
Indian Council of Historical Research, Manohar, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 368, Rs. 700.00

## PANGS OF PARTITION: THE HUMAN DIMENSION, VOLUME II

Edited by S. Settar and Indira Baptista Gupta  
Indian Council of Historical Research, Manohar, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 358, Rs. 700.00

## PARTITION AND GENOCIDE: MANIFESTATION OF VIOLENCE IN PUNJAB 1937-1977

By Anders Bjørn Hansen. Foreword by Ian Talbot  
India Research Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 230, Rs. 495.00

The ICHR decided that the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of India's Independence in 1997 was an opportune time to revisit the Partition. The editors of the two-volume set on the Partition which is now before us explain in their introduction that the volumes are organized on the basis of 'the principle of a certain complementarity': Volume I is a 'historian's history' and Volume II is a 'people's history'. The 17 articles in Volume I map the grand narrative of the Partition, with a focus on the high politics leading to the division of India and the aftermath, the activities of prominent political leaders, and the interplay of political, electoral, constitutional, and communal factors at the national and regional levels. The 23 articles in Volume II mostly deal with the representation of the 'human' side of the Partition in literary and non-literary works. As may be expected from any such wide assemblage of essays, the quality of the articles is uneven, ranging from middling to excellent. On the whole, *Pangs of Partition* is certainly a valuable and welcome addition to the burgeoning field of Partition studies.

V.N. Datta, B.R. Nanda, and Chittabrata Palit explore the role of individual personalities and their intervention in the politics of the period. Datta examines the controversy relating to Mountbatten's role in the Punjab Boundary Commission Award (aka the Radcliffe Award). Pakistani historians accuse Mountbatten of colluding with Sir Cyril Radcliffe, Chairman of the Boundary Commission, in altering the Punjab boundary at the last stage (between 8 and 12 August 1947) to the disadvantage of Pakistan by providing India a link to the state of Jammu & Kashmir. His critics claim that Mountbatten played foul because Jinnah refused to appoint him the Governor General of Pakistan. Nanda discusses the deep pain and anguish Gandhi suffered in the last two years of his life at the increasing communal violence and his shock at the acceptance of the Partition plan by the Congress leadership. Palit focuses on the positive aspects of Gandhi's satyagraha and his role as mediator between Hindus and Muslims during the period of the transfer of power,

specifically his relations with Jinnah, Godse, Maulana Azad, and Patel.

Three contributors describe the unfolding events at the national level in the decades leading to 1947 and offer different interpretations of their significance in the chain of causality leading to Partition. Sucheta Mahajan argues that Independence and Partition were parts of an integral whole and must be seen as twin, contingent phenomena. Had the Congress succeeded in evolving a successful strategy to combat communalism with the strategy of anti-imperialism (that is, mass organization), then perhaps it would have succeeded in obtaining both freedom and unity for the country. However, Nehru's generation failed to appreciate the intractability of minority communalism once it had entered the extremist, mass, and fascist phase, and the earlier Congress method of concession no longer worked. The Congress acceptance of Partition was only the final act in a series of concessions made to appease the Muslim League's intransigency. S.K. Chaube argues that had the Constituent Assembly of India not been summoned and allowed to work in the way it did, Partition might not have taken place in August 1947 and possibly not at all. An alternative viewpoint to these 'what-if' histories is offered by Khwaja A. Khaliq (chief editor of *Sadaqat*, a Delhi-based Urdu weekly), who maintains that the demand for Pakistan made in 1940 'was the logical culmination of a long standing communal divide' [p. 113].

Six micro studies examine political developments in the pre-Partition period at the regional level, specifically the NWFP, Punjab, UP, Central Provinces and Berar, Orissa, and the tribal regions of central India and north-east India.

Parshotam Mehra offers 'a view from the top' of the effects of the Partition in the NWFP, reconstructing the chain of events from 8 August to 15 September 1947 on the basis of the entries in the governor's personal diary and on newspaper reports. Events here revolved around the Muslim League's attempts to dismiss the Congress ministry headed by Dr

Khan Sahib, elder brother of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and the relationship of the governor's office with the local leaders and with New Delhi against the backdrop of increasing communal tensions.

Bir Good Gill examines the fate of the Azad Punjab scheme proposed by the Akalis, who were deeply worried that in a Congress-League settlement the interests of the Sikh minority would be sacrificed. Although designed to free both Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus from Muslim-majority rule and yet permit them to remain within India, the very name of the scheme conjured up the idea of secession, which was contrary to the intentions of its promoters. Embroiled in controversy, and 'criticized vehemently by opponents and ignored by the major political parties, the scheme died a premature death' [p. 256].

Salil Mishra critiques the 'coalition argument', popular among historians of modern India, according to which Partition might possibly have been averted if there had been a Congress-League coalition government in UP in 1937. Its proponents believe that had the League been co-opted into constitutional politics in UP, Jinnah might not have been pushed into taking the extremist position which left him no choice but to demand Pakistan. However, Mishra strongly refutes this conjecture, arguing that it is based on faulty empirical premises and that although a coalition was very much on the agenda of a few individuals, it was 'completely marginal and actually contradictory' to the long-term schemes of both the parties.

Kanchanmoy Mojumdar traces the evolution of communal politics in the Central Provinces and Berar, where the widening Hindu-Muslim divide was exploited by the local elements to their own advantage. Before the 1937 elections, communalism in the province posed no serious threat to the authorities since Muslims constituted a very small community and were politically far more inert than the Hindus. However, as a result of the introduction of electoral politics and constitutional reforms and the activities of communal organizations on both sides, Hindu-Muslim rivalry became increasingly bitter.

In the context of the integration of the erstwhile Princely States in the Indian Union, proponents of the thesis of the 'singularity of 1947' regard 1947 as a revolutionary watershed event which brought about 'a bloodless revolution from princely to republican rule'. However, Jayanta Sengupta's study of the political integration of the Orissa states and the influence of the states' question on Oriya regional politics from 1937 to 1949 reveals that there were strong features of continuity with the past. His focus is the role of the Congress in organizing a people's movement, launched by popular bodies called prajamandals, in the Garhjat or the 26 Oriya-speaking princely states in Orissa, and the

party's attempts to draft this struggle into the fold of agitational politics which it had organized in coastal Orissa against the British government and the big zamindars. Sengupta concludes that although the integration of the Princely States during 1947-1949 refashioned the political map of Orissa, it did not mark a radical break in the informal conventions of governance, political behaviour, and the social composition of the ruling elite.

K.S. Singh explores the relatively uncharted area of tribal politics on the eve of Partition and after in the two major tribal regions of the country: middle or central India and northeast India. The newly emerging tribal middle class, educated in Christian mission schools and employed by the colonial administration, led the demand for tribal autonomy in Chotanagpur under the banner of the Adivasi Mahasabha for the creation of a Jharkhand province or an Adivasistan; a short honeymoon period with the Muslim League followed, when the idea of carving out a tribal corridor to link the two wings of East and West Pakistan was seriously considered. The notion of tribal autonomy for the hill tribes of northeast India assumed various forms, many of them suggested by British bureaucrats, ranging from a common administrative agency for the hill territories to a Crown colony protectorate.

Dwijendra Tripathi probes the attitudes of various segments of the Indian business class, ranging from small traders and merchants, manufacturers, industrialists, bankers, both Hindu and Muslim, to the nationalist agenda from the time of the founding of the Congress in 1885 to the adoption of the Pakistan Resolution by the Muslim League at its Lahore session in March 1940 and after.

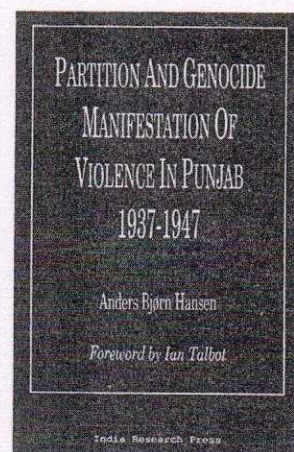
Shri Prakash analyses the economic irrationality underlying the division of India and the resultant economic hardships this caused both the newly independent nations. Practically every sector of the economy in the two countries suffered overall losses as a result of the division of assets, which delayed plans for industrialization and the achievement of economic self-sufficiency.

Three articles discuss Partition historiography. Bishwa Mohan Pandey offers a critique of colonial historiography, specifically the writings of Percival Spear and H.V. Hodson on the event. Pandey argues that 'they utilized history to defend the end of the empire as the completion of the English mission, to explain Partition as the natural result of Indian realities and to project Independence not as the fulfilment of the national movement but as a generous gift of British liberalism' [p. 340]. In his survey of the interpretations of the Partition in the history writing which emerged in the first quarter century of the existence of India and Pakistan as independent nations, Lal Bahadur Varma discovers that communal and nationalist biases in this historiography existed on both sides. He

laments that the 'cliché-ridden and biased history being propagated in the two countries... caters to only sectarian beliefs and works like slow poisoning on a community' [p. 336]. (One wonders why the editors chose to include Krishna Kumar's excellent article on a similar theme—representations of the Partition in the school history textbooks in India and Pakistan—in Volume II, when it would have been more appropriate to place both these articles together.) In his review article of S.A.I. Tirmizi, ed., *Paradoxes of Partition (1937-47), Vol. I (1937-39)*, New Delhi: 1998, Partha Sarathi Gupta highlights the importance of documents and archival research as a corrective to stereotyped accounts of historical events.

Most of the articles in Volume II deal with the narrativizing of the Partition in a range of literary forms including novels, short stories, poems, and plays and in various languages including Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, English, and Bengali. Many literary works written in 1947 and after are now seen to belong to a corpus of writing referred to as Partition literature, whose resurgence owes much to the recent spate of translations and the publication of anthologies and collections. Many scholars, inspired by the postmodernist critique of history as a discipline, claim that this new genre of Partition literature portrays the 'human' dimension of the horrific tragedy which, they argue, can never be articulated in the traditional sources of history writing. The contributors believe that if the histories of the Partition are to be rewritten—and there are several reasons why indeed they should—then we must draw upon the intellectual resources made available to us by creative writers for only they can create the fictional space to give voice to the traumatic realities of Partition violence. Only the creative arts, specifically literature, can sensitively portray the grief, sorrow, trauma, loss, suffering, and violence done to millions on each side of the border. Contributors also address non-literary themes such as painting, film, dance theatre and popular culture, although fewer pages are devoted to these subjects.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the diverse meanings of the Partition is to be found in the school history textbooks of the two countries. It is no surprise that textbook writing in both countries is a politically significant activity, central to the imperative to socialize the young into state ideology (the two-nation theory in Pakistan, 'secularism' in India). The textbooks of both countries treat the event, its prehistory and its aftermath in an evasive, cursory, sketchy, and extremely brief manner; the treatment is largely narrative, not explanatory or interpretative. Krishna Kumar explains that this conceptualization of the history curriculum at the school level is largely the result of the 'textbook culture' of colonial educational systems which attach a great truth-value to a single prescribed (as opposed to recom-



mended) textbook; once the text assumes an incontrovertible authority, there is no place for teacher autonomy nor any room for the acknowledgement of contending perspectives on an event. In addition, policy makers cite technical or pedagogical constraints, such as the huge school syllabus, the limited space for history in the new discipline of social studies, and the intellectual immaturity of children. There are also ideological compulsions whereby any acknowledgement of Hindu-Muslim conflict is seen as a symptom of communalism and hence detrimental to the nation-building agenda of modernization and progress; hence also the need to sanitize the narrative of the freedom struggle to preserve the celebratory aspects of Independence, to safeguard the reputations of leaders in the nationalist pantheon, and to blame the Partition as the result of British machinations. Apologists of this truncated version of events also cite postmodernist criticism of history to avoid discussions of the Partition in school textbooks, such as the by now familiar argument that the discipline of history is poorly equipped to represent the horror, violence, suffering and trauma of events like the Holocaust or the Partition, particularly to young children.

If historical truth in all its complexity is a casualty in the classrooms of India and Pakistan, the shared linguistic and cultural heritage of pre-Partition India has similarly been 'tampered with by linguistic engineering under political pressure and the division of states on linguistic lines' in post-independence India. R.K. Agnihotri laments the loss of this 'fluid multilingual repertoire' which was the most striking feature of the subcontinent before 1947. He traces the increasing polarization in the 1950s and 1960s between Hindi/Urdu which created the 'Muslim-Urdu' and 'Hindu-Hindi' equations, and introduced 'pure Hindi' in the national news media and insisted that it be written in the Nagari script. He cautions us that such interventions, whether the Persianization of Urdu or the Sanskritization of Hindi, are disastrous both for the practice of democracy as well as for

literary excellence.

Partition as a theme has also been appropriated by rural folk culture. Badri Narayan Tiwari explores the multiple representations of the Partition in the *nautanki*, folk songs, and proverbs in the Bhojpuri region of Bihar. The event, which is always depicted as a tragedy, is simplified into the metaphor of 'family partition' and jealousy between elder brother (India/Hindu) and younger brother (Pakistan/Muslim) and converted into a 'type.'

While most of the articles are scholarly, there are a few which might more appropriately be described as personal meditations. These are often a mishmash of personal reminiscences and autobiographical details, interspersed with musings on the contemporary world triggered off by a momentous event such as the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi or the 1992 anti-Muslim riots in Mumbai. Keshav Malik, poet and art critic, finds that the early paintings of Satish Gujral (from 1947 to 1954) reveal the influence of the 'highly volatile and expressionistic manner of the Mexican masters'; he argues that these early oil-on-canvas works display an immediacy, intensity, and sorrow which are 'crucial for our own catharsis'. Satish Gujral in turn recalls the circumstances under which he and his father left their hometown Jhelum, midway between Lahore and Rawalpindi, and the family's journey to India and all that befell them on the way. Mrinal Pande's musings on the meaning of Partition and its legacy for contemporary India are inspired by Urvashi Butalia's study *The Other Side of Silence* (1998). K.S. Duggal, poet and novelist, prefers Punjabi verse as the creative medium of expression to depict the Partition; he focuses in particular on Amrita Pritam's poem 'Waris Shah Nun'. In an extensive interview to Alok Bhalla (the only one here with two contributions), Bhisham Sahni discusses day to day life in pre-Partition Punjab, Hindu-Muslim relations, his childhood in Rawalpindi, his youth in Lahore, his ideological beliefs, the writing of his Hindi novel *Tamas* (1974) — it won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975 — and its later telecast as a miniseries.

Obviously the narrativizing of such a watershed event in the history of the subcontinent cannot be divorced from methodological and historiographical concerns. Mushirul Hasan surveys the main historiographical debates in both India and Pakistan and pleads for the need 'to revisit the old fashioned theories on the syncretic and composite trajectory of Indian society and define... the shared values and traditions that had enabled diverse communities to live harmoniously for centuries' [p. 176]. He argues that it is possible to develop a common reference point for rewriting the *histories* of an event 'without calling into question the legitimacy of one or the other varieties of nationalisms'. Urvashi Butalia, whose pioneering role in Partition studies is well known, discusses the value of

oral narratives and journals, diaries, memoirs, and personal accounts as sources for the reconstruction of history. She does not seek to valorize one kind of history writing over the other and instead suggests that conventional or factual histories of the Partition be placed alongside oral narratives so that both can enrich and inform each other. Ameena K. Ansari, Alok Bhalla, and M. Asaddudin among others comment on the methodological problems inherent in the project of translation. Khalid Hasan's translation of Saadar Hasan Manto's Partition stories into English provokes a scathing and withering attack from Bhalla, who faults Hasan for betraying both the letter and the spirit of the original stories. In turn, the three volumes edited by Bhalla, *Stories About the Partition of India* (1997) are the subject of a critical analysis by M. Asaddudin.

Nandi Bhatia discusses the role of literary representation in retrieving alternative narratives of the Partition and their intervention in the dominant historiography of the event; he argues that both *Tamas* and Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* 'offer a critique of the distortions of official histories' [p. 204]. Kamlesh Mohan explores the woman-centred theme of Kashmiri Lal Zakir's novel *Karamanwali*, first published in Urdu in 1980 and later translated into Hindi and Punjabi and also staged as a play; it is based on the real-life story of a Pakistani mother's obsessive search for her son in India from whom she was separated decades ago. Shikoh Mohsin Mirza looks at Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956), perhaps one of the best-known contributions to the genre of Partition literature. Sukrita Paul Kumar analyses some key literary writings from this genre and traces their influence on the emergence of a new philosophical and psychic sensibility in Indian literature exemplified by the *Nai Kabani* movement in Hindi and the *Naya Afsana* movement in Urdu during the 1960s. Naresh Jain examines Arifa Hosain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), about a young Muslim girl from a *taluqdari* family of Lucknow who describes the tumultuous decades of the 1930s and 1940s. He finds that Hosain offers a refreshingly realistic portrayal of the subterranean tensions between Hindus and Muslims and the growing tensions and hardening attitudes between the two communities, particularly after the reorganization of the Muslim League and the 1937 elections.

Ameena K. Ansari examines Ashfaque Ahmed's *Gadariya* (The Shepherd), a poignant tale of Munshi Chintram, better known as Dauji. He is a dedicated scholar of Islamic culture and Persian literature who embodies the *guru-shishya parampara*, the ancient tradition which is the hallmark of the composite culture of the subcontinent. Dauji himself was transformed from Chintu, the ignorant, low-caste Hindu goatherd, into Munshi Chintram, the Persian scholar, by the dedication and love of his revered teacher. Dauji

struggles in turn to impart his knowledge to Golu, his reluctant student and the narrator of this story. But the Partition destroys all the old values. Ranu, the brutish town *goonda*, abuses Dauji, cuts off his *bodhi*, forces him to recite the *kalma*, and spares his life on the condition that henceforth the old man tend to Ranu's goats. Without his books, his learning, his history, Dauji is lost. His displacement is not physical or geographical but psychological and spiritual; he is reduced to the metaphorical outsider in his own land.

Balancing the predominance of studies on Partition literature from the western sector in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and English are four articles which focus on the Bengali contribution from the eastern sector. However, the contributors note that the Partition does not form the direct theme in Bengali fiction and films. Partha Chatterjee explores the place of Partition in eight films by Ritwik Ghatak, in six of which the political division of Bengal, and by implication of India, plays a crucial role. But even here Chatterjee notes: 'The Partition never figures directly in Ritwik Ghatak's films; rather it is a riveting memory image of a cataclysmic event that had far reaching consequences' [p. 59] Monmayee Basu's essay on the oral narratives testifying to the immense suffering of Bengali Hindu women from East Bengal/East Pakistan goes some way in filling the gap in the historiography of Partition violence in Bengali fiction.

Tapati Chakravarty examines what she calls 'the paradox of the fleeting presence' of the Partition in Bengali novels and short stories, but its notable presence in Bengali poetry. She believes that the answer to this puzzle lies in the difference between the specific historical development of fiction and poetry as literary forms. She argues that of the 15 Bengali novels that deal with the Partition, only three can qualify as Partition novels. Bengali fiction by the 1940s had becoming increasingly and self-consciously contemporary and realist in the choice of its subject matter. In contrast, poetry, while being historically rooted, did not find it essential to use 'experientially concrete history' to construct its imagery. This pliability of Bengali poetry as a literary form permitted the Partition to appear as a central leitmotif in many contemporary poems.

Perhaps another explanation for the neglect of the Partition as a direct theme in Bengali fiction lies in the class position of the author. Anindita Mukhopadhyaya argues that the Bengali writer Sharadindu Bandopadhyaya, the quintessential middle-class patriarchal liberal Hindu, remained unaware of the ambiguity of his own position as a recorder of the Partition and of Partition violence which generated tremendous feelings of insecurity among the Bengali middle class. He never addressed the issue directly but only took 'a few sidelong glances' at the 'brooding, malignant presence of communal passions' in five of his works. His writings envisage not only the



Muslim as 'Other' but there is also a near-total silence about the refugees pouring into Calcutta from East Bengal. His fiction reveals the deep prejudices of the resident Bengalis against the newcomers from the East whom they regarded as interlopers.

Although the Partition remained largely peripheral in Bengali fiction—appearing 'only as a fragmented consciousness at the peripheries of the narrative' in Chakravarty's words—the theme did appear in Bengali theatre. Jayanti Chattopadhyaya examines the politics of representation of the Partition in two Bengali plays written in the first decade after 1947: Salil Sen's 1950 play, *Natun Jhudi* (The New Jews) and Tulsidas Lahiri's 1953 play, *Banglar Mati* (The Earth of Bengal). The playwrights, who were both closely associated with IPTA, the anti-fascist theatre organization established in 1943, choose to deal with the predicament of upper-caste Hindu families from East Pakistan who migrate to Calcutta. Both plays depict the 1947 partition against the backdrop of the 1905 partition, which provoked the first mass nationalist agitation in India. Both represent the contemporary political struggle of the Left as the continuation of the Swadeshi movement. Although both plays address issues dealing with the underprivileged, the underdog is never a central concern. Nor do they directly address the Hindu-Muslim question. Sen and Lahiri choose to represent the Partition as the plight

of the *bhadralok*. 'Reverting to the Swadeshi movement gave the *bhadralok* an opportunity to valorize the cultural unity of Bengal and to propagate the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Partition in 1947, in this context, could then be evoked as only an aberration, a mark of loss and failure,' argues Chattopadhyaya [p. 311].

From representations of Partition violence in literary and non-literary media, we now turn to a more conventional and straightforward political history of Partition violence. Anders Bjørn Hansen (University of Copenhagen) describes the development of communal violence in Punjab in the decade before Partition, and characterizes the violence in the last part of this period as genocidal. Communal violence in 1937-47 in Punjab was the result of well-organized and deliberate efforts by 'private armies': the Muslim League National Guards, the RSS, and the Akal Fauj. These private armies began as self-defence organizations but increasingly reflected the growing militant posture adopted by their parent communities.

The violence that immediately preceded Partition was qualitatively different from the communal violence that had usually prevailed in colonial India. Hansen identifies the riots in Rawalpindi in March 1947 as the turning point, when the threshold between traditional violence and genocidal violence was crossed.

The aim of traditional violence is to defend

one's community. The aim of genocidal violence is to ethnically cleanse one's area of the 'Other' through organized mass killings on a large scale; forced migrations render unprecedented numbers of people homeless and force them to become refugees; women are the main victims as rape, abduction, and the mutilation and dismemberment of the reproductive and sexual organs are meant to defile and decimate the future generations of the enemy; the violence becomes uncontrollable because the administrative machinery cannot cope with the civil-war-like atmosphere. Hansen characterizes the violence in Punjab in 1947 as 'reciprocal genocide'. Genocide studies have emphasized the pivotal role of the state, but Hansen argues against this state-centric approach in establishing a case of genocide in Punjab where after Partition the state did not have a well-defined role.

Hansen's study duly provides the larger historical context against which communal violence in 1937-47 and reciprocal violence in 1947 developed in the Punjab. He reconstructs the chronological narrative largely on the basis of the fortnightly reports of the colonial state and from newspaper accounts. Unfortunately the book is marred by extensive typographical errors which detract from its overall quality. ■

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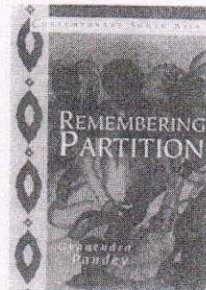
## A Dossier of Barbarity?

Sucheta Mahajan

REMEMBERING PARTITION, VIOLENCE, NATIONALISM AND HISTORY IN INDIA

By Gyanendra Pandey

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 218, Rs.595.00



If you thought Gandhi and our nonviolent, mass movement for Independence were the biggest things that happened in India in the twentieth century, Pandey's new book is essential reading for you. For he presents another contender for top rung, the Partition of India. The book is a curious attempt to push the Partition of India up the escalating scale of violence; a ladder whose rungs were so far occupied by the Nazi holocaust and the World Wars, the most colossal and barbaric episodes of violence in the twentieth century. Pandey would have it that the Partition was genocidal violence and it was a holocaust and for good measure, he adds a third appellation, ethnic cleansing, as if genocide and holocaust were not bad enough.

The primacy given to violence is obvious enough from the title, "Violence, nationalism and history in India". The book is described as a critique of nationalism. The basic argument is that narratives of particular experiences

of violence go towards making the community. The allegation is that nationalist historiography has made too facile a separation between Partition and violence. Pandey says for survivors, partition was violence, whereas historians' history seems to suggest that what Partition amounted to was in the main a new constitutional/political arrangement which did not deeply affect the central structures of Indian society or the broad contours of its society.

This is shadow boxing – which serious historian of Partition argues that it was primarily a constitutional arrangement? Many "historian's histories"—including Mushirul Hasan's writing, Gyanesh Kudaisya and Tan Tai Yong's *Aftermath of Partition* and my work, *Independence and Partition*—point to the enormous consequences of Partition for the polity, economy and society that evolved after Independence. My work highlights the attempt of the communal forces to subvert the establishment of a secular polity. Hindu

communal forces raised the demand for a Hindu rashtra on the ground that Pakistan was an Islamic state. So Partition was communalization of politics.

In one of the chapters, published earlier as 'The Prose of Otherness' in *Subaltern Studies*, Pandey alleged that historians are uncomfortable with matters such as the horror, pain and anguish of violence, which the creative writers express so evocatively. This disparagement of the historian's craft could not have pleased the historians' tribe, but curiously the attempt to place literary representations of Partition centrestage did not earn him any friends among the literary fraternity. A literary critic pointed out that he merely uses literary sources to embellish his history, which, his claims notwithstanding, he continued to write with a capital 'H'.

Pandey refers to his differences with Javed Alam, Suresh Sharma and Alok Bhalla on the position that Partition was rape and killings.

The book is a curious attempt to push the Partition of India up the escalating scale of violence; a ladder whose rungs were so far occupied by the Nazi holocaust and the world wars, the most colossal and barbaric episodes of violence in the twentieth century.

Bhalla makes a very important point that it was man's struggle for his moral being amidst horror that is the focus of literature. Else, what we have are dossiers of barbarity. The work under review amounts to that because there is no moral perspective into which the study of violence fits. It is not from a perspective of nonviolence, in which horrors of violence are highlighted so that people may recoil in trepidation at what man can do to man — like, for example, the objective of the exhibits at the Hiroshima Museum. I share Javed Alam and Suresh Sharma's reservation about recording memories of Partition. Suresh Sharma's point about acts of kindness by members of one community towards those of the other community is important. Those of us who see communal violence ripping our society asunder cannot talk so easily of violence constituting community, we look desperately for unifying elements, for threads which bind communities.

Pandey would have it that forgetting the violence of Partition is to ensure the unity of the nation. I fail to see how forgetting is a statist project. To me it seems to arise from the need of individuals to move on, to get on with the business of living. Pandey's agenda, "remembering Partition" has a disturbing ring to it, it sounds like talk of the "unfinished business" of Partition, which imprisons the two countries in conflict, helps right wing, jingoistic agendas to dominate and prevents us from addressing the real issues of social injustice and economic inequality.

Pandey's argument for a history without a perspective, a history that does not condemn or condone violence, but sees "things as they are" ("Doesn't see things as they are? Then he's no good," says the cynical Chester of Jim in Conrad's novel.) is utterly irrelevant and indeed dangerous in a society that has not vanquished the divisive communal canker that threatens to engulf India and Pakistan both internally and externally even after fifty years.

Pandey's critique of nationalism, secularism and even humanism flows from the anti-modernist discourse that endears expatriate intellectuals to their 'orientalist' constituency. Collapsing communalism with violence, genocide, ethnic cleansing and the Partition with the holocaust, and secularism with the rooting out of religion is an intellectual indulgence that can only be enjoyed in the secure and inviting climes of the first world.

The social and political fragmentation that originated in the Partition and bedeviled the polity of both India and Pakistan for more than half a century urgently calls for a consistent engagement to discover ways and means to heal the rift and unify society. What for Pandey is a limitation—"Indian historical writing, it seems to be, has never escaped from the constraints of this obligation to demonstrate oneness"—is for concerned Indian citizens a matter of survival. Intellectuals like Pandey contribute little by denying any value to secularism and humanism.

Of Congress and Hindu villains and Muslim victims for long years now discerning historians have pointed to the commonality of agendas of the neo-imperialist 'Cambridge school' and the subaltern group. Portraying the Congress as totalitarian is surely one uniting element. Pandey accepts Ayesha Jalal's contention that Congress wanted Partition of provinces and Jya Chatterjee that in Calcutta Hindus demanded Partition. This is surprising, as it is obvious that Partition of provinces was conditional on Partition of India, to protect minorities in Punjab and Bengal. The secular state at the time of Independence is not recognized as something important, its nationalism is decried, the tallest of its leaders exposed as frail—Gandhi calling for return of abducted women, Patel demanding Muslims be loyal, Nehru insensitive to the enormity of what happened in Garhmukteshwar, etc. Why does Pandey not write about Gandhi's efforts in Bihar to help Muslim victims or the Bihar's Prime Minister Srikishna Sinha's refusal to accept Hindu Mahasabha's complaints but receptivity to Muslim complaints? Why does Pandey not tell us that Mahavir Tyagi, whom he portrays as a Hindu communalist, was the man whose courage in stopping Hindu mobs from attacking Muslims in Dehradun in August/September 1947 is legendary, that Tyagi was speaking as a friend of Muslims when he advised them to give up separatist politics and not demand separate electorates.

Pandey's account of the Humayun's Tomb relief camp where Muslims took refuge when riots broke out in Delhi in September 1947—that it was considered as a responsibility of the Pakistan government which sent rations there—is belied by contemporary accounts, including the one by H.M. Patel, which speak of the politicians and officials going all out to contain the riots. This does not impress the author. The government's all out efforts to control the situation are dismissed as routine: "these streamlined agencies at the centre of government ensured that decisions were taken quickly and their implementation continuously monitored; and they contributed substantially to containing the violence" (p.139).

A worrying thought. Why are both the case studies, Garhmukteshwar and Delhi, of Muslim victims and Hindu perpetrators? Why is there nothing on the pain of the Hindus of Lahore, who would have bemoaned the loss of

Lahore and all it stood for, like Dehelvi and Barelvi mourn the loss of Dilli? Why does Pandey not interview Muslim perpetrators of violence? Hindus and Sikhs are rarely victims, and even when they are, their moment of victimhood is denied, compromised, tainted, as for example, the Sikhs from Rawalpindi, who are projected as patriarchal aggressors who sacrifice their women for honour (Thoa Khalsa).

One last question. Why does the note of cynicism which runs through the entire book—should we not accept that we Indians are brutal, violent—suddenly change in the last paragraph to a concern with conjuring up political communities that are less exclusive and not based on religion? The entire text is against glorifying secular, it is seen to be as homogenizing as communal nationalism—he doesn't see much to distinguish secular from communal e.g. the secular state also talks of 'our', 'us' when it comes to minorities. Then why a final gesture of homage to the inclusive non-religious political community?■

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# An Ongoing Debate

Meena Bhargava

PARTIES AND POLITICS AT THE MUGHAL COURT, 1707-1740

By Satish Chandra

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2002, pp. xxviii + 354, Rs. 595.00

The fourth edition of *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740* is a reassuring move for it reiterates the importance of socio-economic factors in the understanding of the crisis in the Mughal Empire. When first published in 1959, this book had presented a counter argument to Jadunath Sarkar's thesis, which had held Aurangzeb's religious orthodoxy as the sole singular reason for the decline of the Mughal Empire. In this context, it needs to be stipulated that the new edition of Satish Chandra's book firmly establishes that religion was not the only motivating factor in Medieval India. In fact, as the author says in his Preface "this would also help in placing religion in a broader socio-political and economic context".

The discussion on the working of the *jagirdari* system and its implications for the Mughal State, initiated by *Parties and Politics* in 1959 has continued in the new edition. There was no unanimity amongst the scholars then and neither is it there now on the issue. The publication of Satish Chandra's book in 1959 had led to a series of publications from Aligarh University expounding different reasons and extending the debate on the decline of the Mughal Empire. These included the works of Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of the Mughal Empire, 1556-1707* (1963); M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (1966) and Noman Ahmad Siddiqui, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals* (1970). These historians (including Satish Chandra), although differing in their formulations on the decline of the Mughal Empire argued that the eighteenth century was a period of decline, marked by static, stagnant economy. [Satish Chandra since then has, however, changed his views on the eighteenth century, which are discussed in his *The Eighteenth Century in India: Its Economy and the Role of the Marathas, the Jats,*

Satish Chandra has refrained from large-scale revision of the book. The body of the text remains the same except for a note on the crisis of the *jagirdari* system, which was earlier added when People's Publishing House published the third edition of the book in 1979.

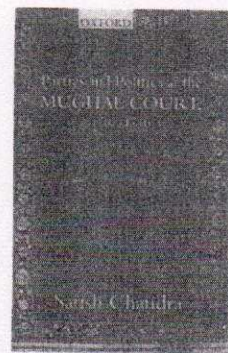
*the Sikhs and the Afghans* (1986; rev. Edn. 1991)].

The debate begun by *Parties and Politics* did not stop here. In a symposium on the decline of the Mughal Empire, held in the 1970's, M.N. Pearson, J.F. Richards and Peter Hardy accepted the diagram of tensions sketched by Aligarh historians but they proposed important modifications to the direction and the reading of the strength of the tensions at work.

The debate on the eighteenth century and the decline of the Mughal Empire has continued to grow and in that sense the impact of *Parties and Politics* has been positive. In the recent years, scholars have challenged the notion of centralized Mughal State and have emphasized on the importance of regional studies. They have argued that if we view the developments with the perspective of the decline of the Mughals, it prevents us from seeing the causes of stability or turmoil in a region. Inadvertently, therefore, all our conclusions about different regions get linked to the decisions and policies of the Mughal Emperors or the structural flaws of the Mughal Empire.

Satish Chandra acknowledges new studies and debates in his Preface of the present work although he does not review them except for those which have a bearing on the issues raised in his study. In this context, he mentions but disagrees with the interpretations of Athar Ali and J.F. Richards on the working of the *jagirdari* system. Muzaffar Alam's work has been cited to explain the norm of *jagir-i-watan* and the military and technological challenges faced by the Mughal Emperors.

Satish Chandra has refrained from large-scale revision of the book. The body of the text remains the same except for a note on the crisis of the *jagirdari* system, which was earlier added when People's Publishing House published the third edition of the book in 1979. He probably leaves the text unchanged for the reason that he had suggested in the Preface to the second edition. To quote him, "If I was to rewrite now the book I had written earlier, it might be a different book". Having said this, Satish Chandra, an objective historian and scholar, has acknowledged new research and fresh evidence in all the subsequent editions of his book. Thus, even though the text largely remains the same, he has incorporated in an addendum or a note such points that he thought needed to be defended



or modified in the light of new evidence.

Reiterating and defending his thesis in the present study, Satish Chandra argues that "a tripod" or a triangular relationship between the *jagirdar*, *zamindar* and the *khudkasbt* was the basis of rural stability in Mughal north India. The purpose of the *jagirdari* system was to cope with a social-political situation that was rapidly changing in the eighteenth century. If the system worked smoothly, it could consolidate and promote a centralized Mughal polity and check the centrifugal tendencies represented by the *zamindars*. Towards the end of Aurangzeb's reign, however, the Mughal failure to maintain the system had become evident. To explain the manifestations of crisis during the first half of the eighteenth century, Satish Chandra studies the role of the nobility with reference to the position of various ethnic and religious groups, their growing factionalism and clash for power and also their struggle for the possession of productive *jagirs*. These patterns deepened the social crisis and increased factionalism in the ruling class. This, combined with the crisis of the *jagirdari* system resulted in the collapse of the central polity. Analysing these developments and supporting his arguments on the basis of evidences from several documents, Satish Chandra suggests that *jagirdari* crisis was at the core of the crisis of the Mughal Empire and that "the main thesis put forward in this work still remains valid".

These arguments however valid have not been able to effect any consensus amongst scholars on the decline of the Mughal Empire. The thesis of the *jagirdari* crisis is as popular amongst the students of medieval Indian history as the "agrarian crisis" of Irfan Habib or that the eighteenth century was a period of growth, continuity and change. All these interpretations have to be studied for a proper understanding of the eighteenth century – a century, which apart from several developments also witnessed the decline of the Mughal Empire. In this context, the book *Parties and Politics* will always remain an important source for the students of Medieval Indian History. ■

Meena Bhargava is in the Department of History, Indraprastha College, University of Delhi, Delhi.

# Colonial Collaborators: Dusky Warriors

Kaushik Roy

'BEST BLACK TROOPS IN THE WORLD': BRITISH PERCEPTIONS AND THE MAKING OF THE SEPOY, 1746-1805

By Channa Wickremesekera  
Manohar, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 212, Rs 450.00

British domination of Asia was part of the process of European expansion in the Afro-Asian continents. The expansion of the European maritime powers in the non-European world started in the eighteenth century. In the case of India, British expansion began in the 1740s and ceased only in the 1840s. Capitalism may be the engine behind European extension in the extra-European world but the instrument of expansion was the armed forces of the colonial powers. Both in the conquest and consolidation of the colonial territories, the armies played a crucial role. Hence, scholars like H.L. Wesseling ('Colonial Wars: An Introduction' in *Idem.* and J.A. de Moor [eds.] *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989, pp. 10-11) categorizes European colonial endeavours as 'Violent Colonialisms'.

But, what sorts of armies did the colonial powers deploy for subjugating the colonies? The metropolitan armies were not only excessively costly but heat, dust and disease also made them ineffective. All over the non-European world, malaria, cholera, yellow fever and sunstrokes killed more white soldiers than the military opposition from the colonized. Hence, all the colonizing powers, be it the Dutch in Indonesia, the French in Algeria or the British in India, depended on the non-European soldiers. The Afro-Asians were recruited in armies officered by the white troops. Regular pay and pension were the incentives offered by the colonizers to the colonized. Thus, the black and brown warriors constituted crucial non-western foundations of western empire building in the extra-western world.

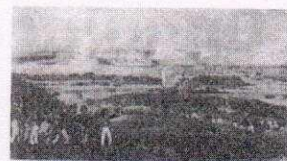
Among all the colonial armies, the British officered Indian Army i.e. Sepoy Army was the largest volunteer force in the world. And the importance of the Sepoy Army for the Company Raj can be gleaned from the fact that it consumed 45% of the British-Indian Empire's revenue. And the colonial Indian Army also had great impact on the colonized society. It was the largest employer in the subcontinent. Every year about 20,000 illiterate and semi-literate peasants joined this force.

From the 1990s, scholars have shown interest in the British-Indian Army as a social phenomenon. They have followed what

broadly could be categorized as 'War and Society' approach. The representatives of this School argue that the Sepoy Army by integrating certain communities of the colonial society aided the construction of colonial power. Both Seema Alavi's *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) and David Omissi's monograph titled *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Basingstoke/London: Macmillan, 1994) focus on the Sepoy Army as a vehicle for upward mobility for certain indigenous communities. However, the works of Seema Alavi and David Omissi concentrate on the nineteenth century. Channa Wickremesekera in the book under review, which is the modified version of his Ph.D. thesis of Monash University, turns the spotlight on the eighteenth century. Following the 'Organizational framework', which emphasizes on institutional superiority instead of technical excellence on part of the Europeans vis-a-vis the non-Europeans, Wickremesekera attempts to analyse the genesis and structural aspects of Britain's sword arm in India.

The British, writes Wickremesekera, recruited certain indigenous groups in order to construct a Western modelled professional army. Professionalism of the Sepoy Army, argues Wickremesekera, explains its continuous victories against its Indian opponents. What indeed were the elements of British imported professionalism?

There is a debate regarding the genesis of professional armies in the West. Geoffrey Parker in his pathbreaking book titled *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) asserts that the military superiority of the West against the rest was due to a Revolution in Military Affairs (hereafter RMA) in the sixteenth century. The RMA gave birth to bureaucratic permanent standing force under the control of a hierarchical officer cadre. And the very necessity of constructing and feeding this revolutionary Leviathan resulted in the growth of centralized polities in Europe. Jeremy Black challenges this thesis of Military Revolution by advancing his concept of Military Evolution. In *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke/London:



'Best Black  
Troops  
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CHANNA WICKREMSEKERA

Macmillan, 1991), Black claims that instead of revolutionary developments, West Europe experienced only slow incremental growth from the fourteenth century. Moreover, writes Black, till the nineteenth century, the European supremacy over the non-Europeans, was marginal indeed.

However, Wickremesekera accepts Parker's Military Revolution thesis. The British, according to him, introduced elements of the RMA while constructing the Sepoy Army. He writes that in India, the reach of the pre-British polities was limited. Instead of recruiting directly, the Indian rulers depended on the warlords. The pre-British indigenous armies were mainly conglomerations of cavalry warriors brought together by the *jagirdars* i.e. the semi autonomous political chiefs. For infantry, the Indian kings depended on the jobber-commanders who were clan chiefs cum landowners of the villages. The latter group negotiated with the rulers regarding terms and conditions of service of the infantry supplied by them. As the rulers had no direct contact with the soldiers who being recruited and paid by the *jagirdars* and jobber-commanders were more loyal to them rather than to the Kings, desertions and treacheries in the princely militaries were common. In contrast, the Sepoy Army got rid of the jobber-commanders and recruited men directly from the villages. In fact the British induced their sepoys to bring their relatives from their villages, who were screened by the regimental colonel commandants before being enlisted.

Due to the divisive political structure of the indigenous polities, writes Wickremesekera, the Indian princely armies like those of Tipu Sultan, the *Nawab* of Arcot and the Peshwa lacked a cohesive command apparatus. In contrast, a centralized hierarchical command and control system was present in the Sepoy Army. Officers constituted the brain of a professional army. An officer cadre with a clear-cut hierarchy was absent in the pre-colonial Indian armies. An *ad hoc* grouping of the various *jagirdars* in the exigencies of the battlefield was the general rule. The grouping

The British, writes Wickremesekera, recruited certain indigenous groups in order to construct a Western modelled professional army. Professionalism of the Sepoy Army, argues Wickremesekera, explains its continuous victories against its Indian opponents.

of the Indian warlords was shaped not so much by their experience of military combat as by the nature of political alliance contracted by the rulers with them. Due to absence of military expertise on part of the warlords who were also absentee landlords, the soldiers of the Indian rulers fought as aggregates of individuals and not as cohesive bodies of soldiers. But, the induction of British officers in the Sepoy regiments was a break with Afro-Asian military culture. The white officers constituted a professional body motivated by corporate ethos, as they were not allowed to indulge in politics and private trade. Rather they followed soldiering throughout their lives thus becoming 'specialists of violence'. In return the East India Company offered them a hierarchical

career pattern with rewards and rank structures.

And this professional army of the Company had a devastating effect against the unprofessional military tradition of the Indians. While the armies of the Indian rulers over-emphasized proficiency of the individual skills in arms, the Sepoy Army under the direction of the white officer corps honed corporate skill of the warriors within the format of the regimental structure. Hence, agrees Wickremesekera with Stephen Peter Rosen (*Societies and Military Power: India and its Armies*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pre-British Indian armies were incapable of implementing complex maneuvers in the battlefields. So, the indigenous armies were no match against the Company's sepoys.

Following Dirk Kolff (*Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan: 1450-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Wickremesekera writes, that the loosely knit indigenous militias of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could only be used for reducing the lesser chiefs to the status of vassalage by conducting raids against the enemy. On the other hand, the tightly knit Sepoy Army was used effectively for permanent annexation of territories after destroying the enemy militaries in decisive *Kesselschlachts*

(set-piece battles). One such big battle was Assaye fought in 1803 where in a single afternoon Daulat Rao Sindhia's Maratha Army was destroyed due to a judicious combination of firepower and movement by the Sepoy Army under the Sepoy General Wellington.

Wickremesekera fills up a historiographical gap by turning the spotlight on the period which witnessed the emergence of the Sepoy Army. Not any racial factors but superior organizational techniques that were exemplified in the making of the sepoy soldiers as 'agents of violence' aided British expansionism in India. And this in turn gave rise to an ever expanding colonial state. To sum up, Wickremesekera's book is a typical example of the growing genre of South Asia's New Military History. But, most of the practitioners of New Military History tend to forget Clausewitz's dictum that armies exist for conducting big battles. Instead of merely concentrating on social and cultural aspects of the military, as is the fashion now, Wickremesekera deserves our praise for turning our focus again into '*histoire bataille*'. ■

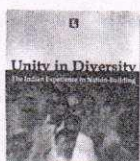
**Kaushik Roy** is a Junior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi. His book titled *From Hydaspes to Kargil: A History of Warfare in India, 326 BC-1999 AD* is forthcoming from Manohar.



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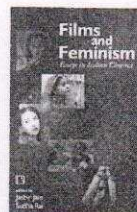
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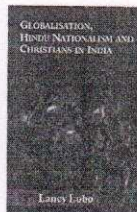
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# Social and Historical Aspects of Bihar

Amar Farooqui

PERSPECTIVES ON INDIAN SOCIETY AND HISTORY: A CRITIQUE

Edited by Hetukar Jha

Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 125, Rs 250.00

Over the past several years the Maharaj-adhiraj Kameshwar Singh Kalyani Foundation of Darbhanga has been engaged in a wide range of academic activities which have enriched our knowledge of various social and historical aspects of Bihar in particular and northern and eastern India in general. For instance, one of the important projects undertaken by the foundation was the compilation of a comprehensive Maithili-English dictionary (*Kalyani Kosha*), which was published in 1999. The foundation has, from time to time, also been organizing lectures by eminent social scientists on a variety of subjects. The present volume brings together five essays—by Ramakrishna Mukherjee, B.B. Chaudhuri, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Surendra Gopal and K.S. Singh—which are revised versions of lectures delivered by them in 1996-7 at the invitation of the foundation.

The themes of the essays are somewhat diverse, although three of them dwell on the vexed issue of caste. Mukherjee looks at caste as a category in relation to class. This is a brief essay and a bit disappointing. Mukherjee notes the impact of colonial rule on the perception of caste as well as on the manner in which social stratification in India manifested itself. The colonial state saw caste essentially as a cultural construct ('caste in itself') which helped to disguise its socio-economic content thereby reinforcing brahminical orthodoxy and caste inequalities. Not surprisingly, 'the caste system received a new lease of life by invigilating itself into the colonial caste system'.

Whereas Marx had provided valuable hints for understanding caste in terms of 'caste for class', modern sociologists from Srinivas to Dumont have preferred to work within the Weberian framework and have thus contributed towards propagating the concept of 'caste in itself'. Mukherjee critiques Srinivas for carrying forward the perception of 'caste sans class' which has been so influential since the 1960s. He argues that ultimately caste has to be related to class differentiation in order to comprehend inequality in Indian society. Nevertheless, India is not a mere aggregate of 'caste and class'. We need to recognize 'caste in class' (why not 'class in caste?'), so as to make sense of contemporary reality. One is left a little confused as to where the specificity of caste oppression would fit into this argument especially since Mukherjee endorses the

position that the Mandal Commission erred in choosing caste rather than class 'as the criterion of backwardness in Indian society'. This has been the typical response of many of those who have criticized the Commission's Report from a leftist position. Yet the violent conservative/rightwing reaction which the Commission provoked was an indication that it had seriously disturbed caste status quo.

Singh's essay is a study of the 'ethnographic dimensions' of the fourteenth century Maithili classic, Jyotirishwara Thakur's *Varna Ratnakara*. The *Varna Ratnakara*, which Suniti Kumar Chatterjee regarded as the earliest surviving Maithili literary composition in prose, is a vital source for reconstructing the social history of north-eastern Bihar. In this essay Singh is primarily concerned with the extensive data on caste contained in the *Varna Ratnakara*. Unfortunately the text has not come down to us in its entirety, but the major portion has and this contains a great deal of information on the division of society into *jatis*, the social-ritual status of the *jatis*, and how this corresponds with the occupational structure. There is a broad classification of *jatis* into *mand jatis*, which are mainly lower castes (many of them easily identifiable today), and *bhadra jatis*. Besides, there is a separate category of forest tribes (*jatis*) of which seventeen are listed. In fact the classification is much more complicated and elaborate than what might be suggested by the notion of a four-fold *varna* hierarchy. This despite Jyotirishwara's familiarity with traditional brahminical texts and his attempt to go beyond Mithila in his listing of castes. The *Varna Ratnakara* remains relevant for understanding how caste identities have evolved over a period of time. Singh has included a useful appendix which enumerates the *jatis* mentioned in the work.

Chaudhuri provides a detailed analysis of the process of what for want of a more precise term might be referred to as 'Hinduization' of tribal people. At one level the choice of an appropriate term has been rendered more difficult by the ideological connotations of terms like 'Hinduization', 'detrribalization', 'conversion' (proposed by Biswamoy Pati in a recent paper), or phrases such as 'transition from tribe to caste'. At another level the problem is that we are not dealing with a single uniform process but with numerous

processes, all of which do not necessarily lead—as Chaudhuri convincingly demonstrates—to full-fledged assimilation into the Hindu fold (the meaning of such assimilation also having to be defined). To some extent the choice of the term depends on the actual process being described. This issue has assumed greater significance in view of the campaign by rightwing religious organizations to appropriate India's tribal communities for an artificially homogenized and intolerant version of Hinduism and to negate their separate identities (the campaign perhaps was not as strident when Chaudhuri delivered his lecture as it has become since).

In his essay, which comprises nearly half the book, Chaudhuri focusses on the interaction between mainstream Hinduism and prominent tribal communities of eastern India (Bhumij, Santal, Munda, Oraon, Ho) against the backdrop of colonial penetration of the region. What emerges is a complex picture in which there is no unilinear transition from tribe to caste. Class differentiation within tribes, often accelerated by colonial presence, usually resulted in elite assertion of superior status in the form of caste hierarchy. In most cases this involved exclusivism on the part of the elite rather than the incorporation of the entire tribe, en masse, within the caste structure. Chaudhuri draws attention to the different ways in which certain groups endeavoured to emphasize their separateness within their respective tribal communities by adopting practices which were perceived to be distinctively Hindu (rather, Hinduism of the upper castes). At what point, we are constantly led to ask, does an adivasi cease to be an adivasi and become a Hindu? In the context of the nineteenth/early twentieth century (Chaudhuri's evidence pertains mainly to this period) this is not an easy question to answer because what should have been the result of a long historical process was now suddenly telescoped within the space of a century due to colonial intervention.

The essays by Bhattacharya and Gopal explore issues related to the writing of regional history. While Bhattacharya examines the concept of regional history and how regions—and regional identities—are historically constructed, Gopal traces linkages between the local, the regional and the national. Gopal discusses the evolution of the movement against indigo planters in Bihar, from the mid-nineteenth century down to Gandhiji's visit to Champaran in 1917, to show how a local movement developed into a regional and subsequently national cause. Gopal offers little new data, but there are fresh insights. Hetukar Jha has done a commendable job in assembling these essays. It is a pity that there are quite a few printing errors which tend to distract the reader. ■

Amar Farooqui is a Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

# Different Events, Different Stories...

Srimanjari

**BENGAL: RETHINKING HISTORY. ESSAYS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Edited by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay

Manohar Books, Delhi, 2001, pp. 326, Rs.650.00

*Bengal: Rethinking History* is an epistemological work consisting of ten essays on colonial Bengal. The essays deal with aspects of colonial Bengal from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Specifically, they range from discussions on the formation period of the English East India Company, essays on peasant and tribal movements, labour, nature of Bengal fisheries, the much discussed Bengal Renaissance and issues of identity formation in the midst of the dominant discourse of nationalism and partition both of 1947 and subsequently of 1971.

The most fascinating aspect of the book is the way in which most writers have addressed historiographic concerns, including inconclusive controversies. A reading of these essays shows the strides taken by history writing on colonial Bengal. There have been changes in the representations of the past through sharper interpretations that highlight the multilayered nature of reality and are marked by methodological innovations. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay observes in the introduction that postmodern scepticism has compelled historians to critically evaluate their source materials. The result has been that scholars have used not just the archival documents at the central and provincial levels, but have used documentary and non-documentary sources largely ignored earlier. The essays in *Rethinking History* do reflect upon these trends.

Any discussion on the beginning of colonial rule in Bengal entails a study of the growth of the English East India Company. Lakshmi Subramaniam in her essay does precisely this. She has highlighted the controversies regarding the pattern of trade before 1757 and after the conquest of Bengal. The prosperity and decline thesis that characterized some of the conventional writings on the subject has been forsaken. The writer concentrates more on the issues that have concerned scholars following N. K. Sinha's (1956-70) pioneering study of the economic history of the region. She has also taken into consideration the new additions to the existing historiography, particularly the works of scholars like Sushil Chaudhury (1995) and Kumkum Chatterjee (1996), who have challenged the relevance of the European factor in the growth of early modern trade in India.

A rethinking of history writing on the peasant and tribal movements in colonial Bengal by Sanjukta Das Gupta takes into account some of the most widely known works of scholarship in this field. However the

scholar seems to be a little unfairly dismissive about writings prior to the launch of the Subaltern Studies collective in the early 1980's. The conspicuous omission of travellers' accounts, the Census Reports and the work of early ethnographers like H. H. Risley (apart from the reports of a few administrators that are mentioned) seems to be surprising, mainly because the preliminary data of some of the secondary writings are derived from them.

Bob Pokrant, Peter Reeves and John McGuire have undertaken to study the history and historical ethnography of Bengal fishers and fisheries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is heartening to note that the work of Sunder Lal Hora, one of the pioneers in this field, has been duly acknowledged. However, the writers fail to mention that S. L. Hora was one of the few who drew the attention of authorities to the plight of fishers during World War II and the famine of 1943 when the demand for fish was at its peak due to the presence of additional military forces in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. The central issue raised is regarding colonial law and jalkar rights or the rights of fishing. By the end of the nineteenth century colonial administration had virtually wiped out the customary right of fishers to fish in certain places. The clash between customary rights and capitalists, as the writers describe it, was all too evident. While attempts have been made to track down changes in the fisheries sector down to the 1980's, the use of literary and anthropological sources to recover the past of the fishers seems somewhat inadequate.

Arjan de Haan's essay, 'Towards a 'Total History' of Bengal Labour', reviews the debates in the field of social history of labour in eastern India, mainly Bengal. He is critical of the neglect in major works of the worker's agency in migrations and organization of labour etc. He cites the work of Ranajit Das Gupta and Dipesh Chakrabarty to show that the sardari system occupies the centrality of place in their discussion. Arjan de Haan is of the view that there is a need to raise a debate about the organization of labour in a manner that is free of overdependence on borrowed models. One of the ways in which this could be done is by tapping oral histories. He refers to the forays made in the study of differences within the working class, mainly differences based on gender and other categories.

The paradigm shifts in the historiography of the Bengal Renaissance is what concerns Brian A. Hatcher. His is the last essay on the theme, 'Economy, Classes and Social Change'.



He focuses both on the assumptions that enabled scholars to uphold the concept of Renaissance or reawakening that the nineteenth century presented and on the works of those who have questioned it. The scholar reaches the conclusion that the period prior to the 1880's was one of gradual improvement rather than drastic or radical break with the past.

Asim Roy's work provides a historiographic perspective to the theme of making of social identity of the Muslims in Bengal, East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh. In his view the case is unique as it represents two strands of identity politics—one based on religion and the other on language. His approach differs from that of scholars like Rafiuddin Ahmed who, according to him, have rejected the strength of syncretistic forces among Bengali Muslims. In Asim Roy's opinion only the study of the long social and cultural history of the region can enable us to understand the pattern of constantly changing identities.

The dominant ideology of caste both competes and coexists with other influences on identity formation. The linkage between caste and class and their impact on power relations has been perhaps one of the most debated sociological issues. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in his essay highlights the fluidity in boundaries between the two. The impact of caste on tribal communities in Bengal, which is of grave concern today in the larger Indian context, is studied through the works of scholars like Shinkichi Taniguchi and Surajit Sinha. Similarly the process of 'Sanskritization' among groups studied by Hitesranjan Sanyal is evaluated critically. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay joins rank with those who consider the caste movements beginning in the early twentieth century to represent both, attempts at 'sanskritization' and protest against the inequities of the caste system. Through his own work on the Namosudras of the eastern districts of colonial Bengal, he draws flak on generalizations. He observes that a study of the changing interplay between identities and their contexts explains more than the available models of homogeneity and linearity.

Samita Sen in her essay called 'Histories of Betrayal: Patriarchy, Class and Nation' tackles in its historiographic context the question of

The most fascinating aspect of the book is the way in which most writers have addressed historiographic concerns, including inconclusive controversies.

gender, one of most obvious and obtrusive markers of identity. To any student of history or gender studies a comprehensive review, such as this, would be immensely useful. She has sought certain points from within the dominant discourse for further examination. The three entry points that are singled out for further research are: complexities in the social reform movement in the nineteenth century, a questioning of the attitude of the nationalist leadership to gender issues, and the impact of colonial policies on patriarchal arrangements, and on the composition of the family and gender relations within and outside it.

The theme of construction of nationalism runs through most of the essays in one form or the other. However, Sugata Bose has undertaken the task of differentiating between the idea of nation and the process of constructing the Indian nation-state. He also considers it absolutely imperative to re-examine the role of religion in this context. He is uneasy about the way in which religion has been treated in what he refers to as the 'secular' statist and 'subaltern' fragmentalist histories. Faulty treatment has caused misleading interpretations of nationalism and communalism.

In her review of the writings dealing with the 1940's in Bengal, Joya Chatterjee explores the impact of developments, particularly from 1935 onwards, on the dominance of the *bhadralok* in electoral politics. In her estimate the two strands of such politics stand apart. They are a) the relationship between the leaders of the Muslim League in Bengal and Jinnah. And b) the shifts in the stand of the Hindu *bhadralok* with a dominant section joining ranks with the Hindu Mahasabha in the localities. One wishes however that she had also considered recent works that highlight the role of bodies like the Prabartak Sangha and the Bharat Sevasram Sangha in organizing sections of the *bhadralok* in activities that encouraged the growth of conservatism in mainstream politics.

*Rethinking History* is certainly a significant addition to the plethora of writings on colonial Bengal. While most issues of primary concern to the history of the region have been taken into account, it would also have been worthwhile to include works on ecological and epidemiological changes in the region. ■

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## Ethno-nationalism qua Ethno-Terrorism

M. Rajivlochan

SIKH ETHNONATIONALISM AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PUNJAB

By Shinder Purewal

Oxford University Press, 2000, New Delhi, pp. 215, price not stated.

Every school child in India learns that "India is a nation characterised by unity in diversity". This kind of sentiment of Jawaharlal Nehru from when he was yet to become prime minister has by now become one of the most extensively used bromides. As with many commonplace sayings, it is also substantially incorrect. It conveniently ignores the fact that diversity is a common human characteristic. Its antonym, uniformity, is not. Diversity and unity are not mutually exclusive concepts. There is no opposition between them. The one does not have to be at the cost of the other. All nations or people in the world, however small, are full of diversity. Despite differences many people manage substantial unity. Conflicts between them remain limited. Yet, in the experience of India the smallest of tensions easily burgeon into serious violence. Many people and much property is harmed. Little wonder that there is always a sense of amazement, where India is concerned, that the country manages to stay together in one piece. Unity in diversity then seems to be a goal to achieve rather than a commonplace statement about the normal state of society. Surprisingly, however, while there have been many studies on what tears India apart the elements that keep it together mostly evoke platitudinous remarks. Shinder Purewal's study is yet another that tries to find an explanation for the schismogenic forces within. But it is different. Purewal's study is refreshing for its innocent use of ideas like petty bourgeoisie, kulak, class, types of capital and sundry other concepts which had ceased to interest academics in the aftermath of the fall of Marxism. One could easily find fault with such dependence on simplistic antediluvian concepts. But they seem to provide Purewal a major analytical advantage. Minimally, enabling him to avoid the pitfall of elevating transient assertions by the public, against the state, to being an expression of the will-of-the-people and hence worthy of respect.

He presumes that expressions of conflict are actually a front for sundry interests. The green revolution in Punjab, he argues, brought forth the Sikh capitalist farmer. This set of kulaks then vied for control over the home market of the state. Is the capitalist farmer the same as the kulak, or are they distinct, I was not able to understand since the one time Young Turk, another time old prime minister and frequent supporter of industrial interests,

Chandrashekhar is also mentioned as a kulak leader. Purewal says that the kulaks fought to gain control of the market from the largely Hindu industrial bourgeoisie. In the process an alliance was created with what he calls godmen, to start off a struggle that tried to first wrest control over the state, failing which a demand was made for an independent state.

Capital in Punjab was predaceous in nature, living off other forms of wealth generated through criminal activity. Purewal argues that it was this predatory capital that produced a "dangerous alliance" between "godmen" and "goons". Who these were is not entirely clear but those with some experience of Punjab might presume that the one was Bhindranwale and perhaps his boys while the other was a set of politicians. Which politicians might belong to this particular category is not clear. Some readers, given such a freedom of interpretation, might presume to include our quondam prime ministers and their regional followers in this category while the others might prefer the various Akali faction leaders and the sometime members of various Sikh terrorist organizations. Anyway, the substantial point that Purewal makes, and I hope I have understood his line of reasoning correctly, is that the emerging dangerous alliance resulted in terrorism and its demand for Khalistan. He talks of a variety of terrorisms like narco-terrorism and sexual terrorism. The demand for Khalistan, however, is called "ethno-nationalism" on the presumption that it demanded a state separate from India. Though, following Purewal's line of reasoning it might have been better called ethno-terrorism.

Throughout the 1980s the conflict in

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Punjab continued. Then, in Purewal's words, as "the kulak-led coalitions at the centre collapsed, the Congress returned to power". Narsimha Rao formed a government. He was under pressure to create conditions conducive for international capital. In the process his government undertook a variety of policy changes. In Punjab it created a Congress government that then used state power, wielded by the indomitable Kanwar Pal Singh Gill, to suppress terrorism, for this Purewal now uses the appellation, "the agitation of the Kulaks". The "Kulak's auxiliary force", which one presumes is just another fancy name for the Punjab terrorists, were reduced. Thus one episode of ethno-nationalism came to an end.

One of the reason, Purewal explains, that the militants could not gain strength was their imperviousness to the "subaltern classes". The "working classes" were hurt by the ban imposed by terrorists on the sale of tobacco and liquor as also the restrictions on the sale of the *Hind Samachar*, which we know was a popular anti-Khalistan newspaper with a presumably right-wing Hindu ideology. At the same time the Indian bourgeois state came down heavily on the terrorists since it could "tolerate no opposition".

There is little in the analysis that Purewal presents with which one can disagree. The only possible fault some might say lies in its simplicity; others might insist that that is precisely its strong point.

My trivial complaints about this book are two. The first is that proof reading could have been done with greater care. The other is an omission. While reference is made to Harish Puri's various early writings there is no effort to engage in a dialogue with the book that he did with Paramjit Singh Judge and Jagrup Singh Sekhon entitled *Terrorism in Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality* (1999). Considering that the data presented in that study would considerably contradict Purewal's analysis, engagement with it might have only strengthened the points that Purewal wishes to make. ■

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## A Radical Theorist

Nonica Datta

SELECTED WRITINGS OF JOTIRAO PHULE

Edited with annotations and introduction by G.P. Deshpande  
Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 239, Rs. 450.00

Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) was born into a mali (gardener) caste. He emerged as a radical theorist, and laid the foundation of a powerful non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. Passionately wedded to his cause, he carved out his place as a leading revolutionary-reformer and left his strong imprint on the latter-day emergence of dalit movements in western India. He was both a theorist and an activist. Indeed, he combined, in his writings, a historian's imagination, a polemicist's energy, and a philosopher's vision.

This book brings together Phule's major writings, both in Marathi and in English. It is enriched by the full text of *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) and *Shekaryacha Asud* (Cultivator's Whipcord), the two issues of the journal *Satsar* (The Essence of Truth), and a selection from the *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (The Book of the True Faith). His English writings include a memorial addressed to the education commission, notes on infant marriage and enforced widowhood, and his letter to a conference of Marathi authors.

At the heart of Phule's genre lies his conception of the 'Aryan invasion'. In his well-known text *Slavery*, he argued that '3000 thousand years ago the Arya progenitors of the Brahmins had come to India [from Iran] not as simple emigrants with peaceful intentions of colonization, but as conquerors.' They enslaved the 'original inhabitants', or the 'kshatriyas'. Their system of mythology, ordination of caste, and code of cruel laws, as sanctioned in the *Manusmriti*, transformed the kshatriyas into shudras and atishudras.

In a dialogue between Jotirao and Dhondiba, the former mocked the conventional Hindu belief that the four varnas had been issued from Brahma's body. Brahma was a 'clever clerk', a 'turncoat' who enslaved kshatriyas, and called them kshudra (shudra). The remaining kshatriyas, maha-ris (mahar), were captured by Parshuram, a 'bully' and a 'barbarous villain'. He prohibited shudras from touching them, and called them atishudra, antyaj, mang and chandal.

Phule's reflections on the caste system influenced his creative journey. Nineteenth-century India was an age of solidification of the caste system and Brahminism, but it also witnessed a challenge to the caste system, both in the form of ideology and caste movements. Whereas his contemporaries and caste-reformists like Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) failed to transcend caste, community

and religious boundaries in their discourses, Phule radically interpreted the caste system by turning Hinduism upside down, and, moreover, questioned the myth of a unified Hindu community. Putting forward an alternative theology to Brahminical Hinduism, he elevated king Bali to the status of the saviour of lower castes.

Phule's ideological framework however was not just built around caste as a ritual category, in terms of purity and pollution, but also as an economically oppressive force. In 'Cultivator's Whipcord', he deftly combined themes of religious persecution and the economic exploitation of the lower castes. He described the vulnerability of the farmer (I wish the editor had retained the word cultivator) in the face of oppressive and exploitative practices in rural society. Interestingly, Chhotu Ram, a leading Jat leader of Haryana, borrowed Phule's language and repertoire to create a Jat-cum-agriculturist identity in colonial Punjab, via his pamphlet 'Bechara Zamindar' written in 1935.

Though Phule laid the foundation of the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra, he went a step further in identifying the secularization of Brahminical authority through its dominance in the British colonial administration and structures. Hence, he emerged as a chief protagonist of lower castes, demanding their share in government jobs and seeking social and economic benefits from the colonial government. In a memorial addressed to the education commission on 19 October 1883, he proposed that primary education be made compulsory till the age of twelve, and asked for separate schools for the shudras. He not only made a case for secular education outside the Brahminical hegemony, but anticipated the latter-day reservation policy pursued by the Government of India. Here, Phule, the visionary, triumphed over Phule, the polemicist.

Yet, Phule's worldview suffered from certain limitations. He did not realize that Brahminical Hinduism was jointly constructed by the British Orientalist scholars and Brahmin pandits. He did not recognize that the colonial state had systematically co-opted Brahmins in its bureaucratic and institutional structures, and that the caste system had been redefined by the British scholar-administrators. Thus, his plea to the government to rescue shudratishudras from their 'unnatural slavery' sounds hollow. Yet, his somewhat loyalist and

Passionately wedded to his cause, he carved out his place as a leading revolutionary-reformer and left his strong imprint on the latter-day emergence of dalit movements in western India. He was both a theorist and an activist.

subservient attitude towards the colonial government was shaped by his commitment to strengthening his non-Brahmin ideology and securing social and economic justice for lower castes.

This collection illustrates, moreover, that Phule espoused human rights and gender justice. Indeed, his handling of women's question was consistent with his non-Brahmin discourse. The conflation of gender and lower caste interests set apart his radicalism from many of his contemporary liberal-conservative reformers. Reacting to B.M. Malabari's notes on child marriage and widowhood, he sensitively talked about a widow's emotional starvation, identifying her status and experience to be equal to that of the shudra. 'She is stripped of her ornaments...she is considered lower than a culprit or a mean beast,' he wrote. A critic of oppressive structures and institutions, he regarded the 'Aryan Institution' as the prime cause of her degraded status.

It is admirable that Phule extended his support to two remarkably bold women of Maharashtra, Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde, who lived their lives on their own

terms and made radical choices. For him, women had no caste: they constituted an undifferentiated community of oppressed beings. In this and other ways, he moved away from a mere focus on caste protest, and offered, instead, a vision of social, economic and political equality. Yet, his concern for human rights did not stem from a humanist or reformist position: it originated from his non-Brahmin worldview. He felt that Hinduism had violated human rights: 'it is the fakeness of Hindu religion,' he commented, 'that treats other fellow human beings as mean and inferior'. He reminded M.G. Ranade, the chief organizer of the Maratha authors' conference, that it was important to discover the 'root of eternal love of all human beings,' and not to 'turn a blind eye among the human beings'. In *Satsar*, too, he told the Brahmin: 'Since you did enslave the shudras and atishudras and have tortured us through generations as if it were your inherited right, until today, you should first restore to the mahars and mangs their due human rights and apologize to them' (sic).

Phule's writings constitute a substantive source on nineteenth-century social history. His critique of the Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj carries conviction. In *Satsar* he questioned, in a dialogic form, the term patriotism, regarding it as a tool of oppression by Brahmins on lower castes. For him, conversion did not compromise a shudra's commitment to the nation, an insight that has considerable contemporary relevance at a time when majoritarianism regards conversion to

Islam and Christianity as 'unpatriotic' and 'anti-national'.

Like his other contemporary social commentators, Phule too harped on the 'Muslim invasion'. Yet, unlike them, he did not give expression to anti-Muslim sentiments. Indeed, he welcomed the 'Muslim rule which brought an end to the horrifying custom of Parshuram burying Mangs with their wives alive in the foundation of the buildings of the Brahmans.' In 'The Book of the True Faith', he referred to the 'monotheistic Mussalmans who did not believe in the caste system,' and welcomed Islam's role in emancipating lower castes from the thralldom of Brahminical dominance. True, he invoked Shivaji, the Maratha ruler, in his writings, but only as a non-Brahmin ruler, a shudra king and a protector of the common man. Significantly enough, Phule was perhaps the sole late nineteenth-century social thinker who foregrounded Shivaji within a subaltern identity.

*Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* is a foundational text, and an invaluable aid to the understanding of nineteenth-century public discourses on religion, caste, gender and human rights. Left Word Books, the publishing house, and G.P. Deshpande, the editor, deserve much praise for undertaking such an important, scholarly venture. ■

**Nonica Datta** teaches History at Miranda House, Delhi University. Her publications include *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (OUP, 1999).

## Documenting Ritual

Jaya Tyagi

### INDIAN FIRE RITUAL

By Musashi Tachikawa, Shrikant Bahulkar, Madhavi Kolhatkar  
Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001, pp. 221+xii, Rs. 495.00

There has been a wealth of material on Vedic rituals recently, a considerable amount of it from scholars of 'Indology' a term used to describe Japanese studies on Indian culture in *Indian Fire Ritual*. Indology is a misleading term because it seems to enhance the element of the exotic in the study of Indian culture by foreign scholars who then necessarily are projected as 'others', alien to what they presume to study. The fact is that scholars, whether 'foreign' or 'Indian' have tackled Vedic rituals from time to time, carrying their own ideological preconceptions.

Also, in spite of this unabashed interest in Vedic ritual there are still some who feel that rituals have no meaning and are 'pure activity' in the ritual arena (Staal) or that they represent a meaningless 'closed system' that has meaning only in itself (Heesterman). Other scholars have shown how rituals are 'workshops' in which realities are forged. Ritual action then is not a meaningless act, it is a 'social instrument' that 'constructs individuals as a part of a class and defines both the classified individual and the classes themselves from within the universe of the ritual' (Brian K. Smith).



These issues do not seem to bother the authors of *Indian Fire Ritual* whose task seems to be simply to explain the performance of the Pavitresti rite as described in the Sanskrit text of the *Pavitrestiprayoga*. Two decades back, in 1983, Frits Staal, documented the performance of the Agnicayana ritual in the voluminous *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of Fire*. The work underlined the need to record the increasingly rare Vedic rites that were till being

The *Indian Fire Ritual* serves as an important work of documentation for the Pavitresti ritual and is surely going to be used by scholars of Vedic tradition. C.G. Kashikar's Foreword is helpful as it explains how the Pavitresti has been described from the time of the *Baudhayana Sruta Sutra*.

performed in India. The two volumes of Staal came with video cassettes recording the rites as they were performed. The authors of *Indian Fire Ritual* seem to be making a similar attempt, albeit on a smaller scale. Besides the obvious similarity of the title, the step by step recording of the Pavitresti ritual with the help of one hundred and forty photographs seems to be compensating for the absent video cassettes.

The *Indian Fire Ritual* serves as an important work of documentation for the Pavitresti ritual and is surely going to be used by scholars of Vedic tradition. C.G. Kashikar's Foreword is helpful as it explains how the Pavitresti has been described from the time of the *Baudhayana Sruta Sutra*. The *Indian Fire Ritual* refers to the structure of the Pavitresti rite explaining the significance of the *homa*, offering of oblations to the sacred fire. These rites are described in great detail in the *Kalpa Sutras* that are part of the vast corpus of Brahminical literature, compiled by Brahminical schools of learning involved in rationalizing the Vedas and their explanatory texts, the Brahmanas. The book explains that the Kalpa-Sutras mention four types of sacrifices—obligatory (*nitya*), incidental (*naimittika*), optional (*kamya*) and expiatory (*prayascita*). The Pavitresti rite, 'an Isti that brings about purification' is an expiatory rite for atonement of sins but it can also be performed for the fulfillment of desires and it is modelled on the *darsapurnamasa* (new moon and full moon day rite). These *sruta* rites are performed by an *ahitagni*, one who has set up the three sacred fires (*agnayadhana*) and who offers daily oblations to them (*agnihotra*). The rite is performed by four priests—the *Hotr*, the *Adhyaryu*, the *Agnidhra* and the *Brahman* each of which represent the Vedas, *Rg*, *Yajur*, and *Atharva*, and who have specialized functions related to reciting the mantras, performing the rites, helping out and general supervision.

The procedure of the rite starting from the declaration of performance and purpose (*sankalp*), the preliminary rites followed by the

main rites and the concluding rites are recorded. The manner in which these rites were conducted is explained in a clear manner and in points. That these points tally with the following photographs makes it convenient to understand the execution of the rites and the specific roles of the performers, including the sacrificer and his wife. Ritual activity helps in showing the manner in which the three levels of existence related to the Gods, the priests as intermediaries and the individual self come in contact with each other. The photographic account of the sacrifice helps in showing the interplay of the priests—the *Adhvaryu*, the *Agnidhra*, the *Hotr*, the *Brahman* and the *Sadasyas*. Preparation for the ritual is elaborate and the rites are divided amongst the priests. The *Yajamana* with his wife and son, are required for the initial declaration of intent but have a negligible role to play while the preliminary rites are going on. Even in the main rites, the focus of attention is on the priests as they are the ones conducting the rites. The manner in which the priest acts as an intermediary between the sacrificer and the deities is interesting as the Pavitresti is actually a rite for expiation. Brahminical ideology projects the fact that the priests take the burden of the sacrificer's guilt on themselves and the 'fruits' of the sacrifice are transferred from the executor (the priest) to the performer (the sacrificer). It is no wonder that the pivotal figures in most of the photographs are the priests, and not as one would imagine, the *Yajamana*.

The attempt is a commendable one involving collaboration of Japanese and Indian scholars and while the ritual was actually performed in Pune in 1979 the book came out only in 2001. The entire exercise would have been useful if the context in which the different rites within the ritual have evolved would have been discussed. The significance of the vitalization of the fire in the rite, the construction of the altar (*vedikarana*), the girdling of the sacrificer's wife (*patnisannahana*), each act has a special purpose. There is need to place these acts and the ritual itself in the correct historical context. In the absence of that, the book remains a text documenting a ritual without any discussion on the evolution of the ritual, the manner in which it changed over time and its contemporary presentation. Unless this is done, a passive compilation of the execution of the few Vedic rites that are still being performed would lead readers to think what Staal ultimately and erroneously, concluded—that Vedic rituals are 'meaningless'. This would defeat the ultimate purpose of the book. ■

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# A Mirror to the Past

Salman Haider

THE HERBERT FELDMAN OMNIBUS COMPRISING THREE VOLUMES: REVOLUTION IN PAKISTAN, FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS, THE END AND THE BEGINNING

By Herbert Feldman

Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2001, pp. 924, PKR 895.00

Herbert Feldman was an Englishman who made his home in Pakistan, having married there. He seems to have led an unremarkable life, with little to distinguish it from countless other lives in his adopted land. He was not a leader of industry, or a scholar, or a famous journalist, or even, so far as we know, a British spy. He did not hang about with the great men of the time and pick up scraps of privileged information to re-cycle elsewhere. He was not even much of a writer, with a bland and unremarkable style of putting pen to paper. In fact, he had no real credentials for the challenging job he took upon himself, that of providing a chronicle of his times. Yet he had the tenacity to stick to it, and over more than two decades he produced three volumes of commentary on Pakistan as it lurched its way through endemic crisis and military rule to the final separation of its two wings. These books have now been re-issued by OUP, Karachi, in one omnibus volume.

For all his obvious limitations, Feldman also had his virtues: his is one man's record, written at no man's bidding, promoting nobody's cause. He was closely engaged in what he describes yet essentially nonpartisan, a sort of Everyman who took an intelligent interest in the world around him. His judgment of events often fails to stand up well in the light of later developments, yet for all that he gives an unusually authentic picture of a past era.

The first volume is the weakest of the three. It is insipid in tone and style. Ayub comes, Iskandar Mirza goes, everyone applauds—(no less joyful was the welcome for Musharraf). Edicts are issued, politicians play their games. Prices rise—Feldman keeps a watchful eye. A large cast of forgotten people flit across the scene. Only the aficionado of recent Pakistani history will be drawn to this narrative. The author has middle-of-the-road views, seems to find that everything turns out for the best in Pakistan, and treats the establishment with exaggerated sympathy. Nothing evokes any great passion, not even the mention of India. Ayub Khan emerges as something of a hero and his system of Basic Democracy receives uncommonly friendly mention. Feldman is greatly concerned to be fair and understanding to all, which makes for unexciting reading.

It is an altogether different matter when

one moves to the second part of the trilogy. The scales seem to fall from Feldman's eyes and the former hero, Ayub, is seen in a much harsher light. His limitations as a leader and the trickery in his political dealings are compellingly exposed. Feldman's style remains mild but his judgment becomes unrelenting. He is no longer the polite foreigner making allowances for the goings on in his adopted country. This transformation makes for a much more absorbing narrative, at times reading like a powerful moral fable about the ways and limitations of military rulers.

The portrait of Ayub Khan is the heart and the core of the book. In the earlier volume, he is shown as assuming power to oust discredited politicians. His amiable personality and bluff manner had an impact and he came across as the straightforward soldier, doing his best for the country. The people were with him, disgusted with the jobbery and corruption that had brought Pakistan low. Better the paternalism of Ayub than the devious wiles of the politicians. Martial law was no bad thing in the circumstances, and the army alone had the prestige to carry the country onward.

But all this was to change. As he chronicles the passing scene, Feldman notes how the small group of generals who seized power from Iskandar Mirza fell out among themselves. Their ambitions drew them apart, and before long Lt. Gen. Azam Khan, a powerful figure whose tenure as Governor of East Pakistan had endeared him to the Bengalis, found himself out in the cold. Ayub could brook no equals.

For a while, Ayub ruled through the army. But this was not something that could go on forever: international opinion demanded some form of representative rule, and within Pakistan, too, there were pressures for democratic governance. So Ayub began to mutate into a politician. The same politicians who had earlier been reviled were cautiously brought out of the shadows in order to give a semblance of civilian rule. Ayub aspired to be President, and it was not enough for the world that he should simply appoint himself to that position, in the same way as he had appointed himself Field Marshal. He needed popular endorsement, and to obtain that he had to win an election. Feldman describes the halting process whereby Ayub brought about constitutional changes, frequently chopping and changing, and going back on his word. He

Feldman makes the interesting observation that 'it is Pakistan's fear of absorption—political, intellectual and economic—by India which is probably the main cause of disharmony'.

tried to take command of the Muslim League, as he needed a party base, but the League was by then a shadow of its former self. His system of Basic Democracy created a select group beholden to him and these were to be the electors of the President—and even then the election had to be rigged. He surrounded himself with advisers who 'were often lackadaisical in their thinking and much half-baked advice was given'. His own intellectual limitations were obvious, and Feldman contrasts the plodding soldier with his brilliant and widely read Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. 'Power, success and flattery spoiled him'. One does not have to dig too deep to see how Ayub's tale foreshadows that of Pakistan's present general. Musharraf and his coterie could delve into Feldman with profit—indeed, one wonders if that is the real purpose of re-issuing these volumes today.

The Ayub years, for all his political blundering, are often regarded as a period of encouragingly high economic growth. But Feldman denies him even this consolation: he accuses him of failure to make urgently needed structural changes and of permitting the further concentration of wealth in a few hands. The privileged may have been well satisfied but there was no improvement in ordinary lives. Moreover, he did nothing to combat the spreading blight of corruption which was widely believed to have reached as far as his immediate family.

Feldman makes the interesting observation that 'it is Pakistan's fear of absorption—political, intellectual and economic—by India which is probably the main cause of disharmony'. He finds Ayub's policy towards India 'over-simplified', for he identified only two issues that divided the countries, Kashmir and the Indus basin waters. Comparable oversimplification is often heard from Islamabad today.

In the period covered by the second volume great strife took place in the sub-continent. India was at war first with China and then with Pakistan. Feldman casts his customary cool look at these events. He considers Ayub to have been ill-advised in initiating moves in Kashmir that led to war in 1965, and then ill-prepared for the Indian reply that was bound to follow. The campaign

For all his obvious limitations, Feldman also had his virtues: his is one man's record, written at no man's bidding, promoting nobody's cause. He was closely engaged in what he describes yet essentially nonpartisan, a sort of Everyman who took an intelligent interest in the world around him.

itself is not discussed in any depth, though the adverse effect on Ayub's position, especially after the Tashkent meeting of January 1966, is carefully evaluated. This was the beginning of the end for him. He clung on for a couple of years more but his credibility was fatally impaired, and Bhutto was snapping unstoppably at his heels.

This leads into the third and final volume, Pakistan under another general, Yahya Khan, its problems more intense, events spinning out of control, eventually to lead to disintegration and the emergence of Bangladesh. Yahya came in to what must be regarded as the customary acclamation accorded to every new military incumbent. But his was a particularly dismal period of rule, and Feldman tells us enough about the man to show how far his failures of character compounded an already impossible situation. Yahya seemed to have had all the limitations of his predecessor while lacking even his public relations skills. Feldman has no great sympathy for the East Pakistanis and considers that the sundering of the two wings was the result of political mismanagement rather than a legitimate nationalist demand. His account offers few fresh insights, and he appears almost bewildered by a stunning sequence of events that he could neither fully comprehend nor adequately describe.

But the limitations of the final volume should not be permitted to detract from Feldman's insightful account of the Ayub Khan years in Pakistan. OUP Karachi has done well to re-issue his books, for they hold up a mirror to today's rulers. As prospects for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan become more problematical and constitutional innovations like the recent referendum are undertaken, a look at the previous failed efforts in this direction can be salutary.

Finally, should there be a reprint of this book, one can hope that OUP will take the trouble to weed out the endless proof reading errors that deface the present text. ■

**Salman Haider**, a diplomat, has served as India's Foreign Secretary.

## An Overview

Sonika Gupta

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AT FIFTY: POLITICS, ECONOMY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS

Edited by Arun Kumar Banerji and Purusottam Bhattacharya  
Lancer's Books, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 319, Rs. 580.00

China Studies is one of the most important and yet under-researched areas in international relations in India. Hence, any new book on China is eagerly awaited by research scholars, analysts and policy-makers in this field. *People's Republic of China at Fifty: Politics, Economy and Foreign Relations* edited by Arun Kumar Banerji and Purusottam Bhattacharya is the latest entrant in this area. This is a collection of papers presented at the national seminar on China, organized by the School of International Relation and Strategic Studies, Jadavpur University in December 1999.

The book is comprehensive in scope with chapters on Chinese foreign policy, strategic policy, bilateral relations with important actors and economy. However, it is not clear what research questions the book seeks to address, with the result that most chapters do not amount to more than an overview. Secondly, the strength of the authors, that is, the ability to provide an Indian point of view on Chinese foreign policy has not been exploited except in the two obvious chapters on Sino-Indian and the Sino-Pak relations. Consequently chapters on China's relations with other actors are fact-sheets derived mostly from existing literature. This includes the chapters on Sino-Russian relations, Sino-Japanese relations, China's maritime strategy and territorial claims in the South China seas. For scholars working on these aspects of Chinese foreign policy, more detailed and in-depth analysis of the issues is available in earlier studies.

The chapter on Sino-Indian relations is critical of India's maximalist position on the border issue and the largely unquestioning acceptance of the white washed version of the 1962 conflict. This is an important observation because it argues for a re-examination of the Sino-Indian conflict creating public opinion in favour of creative thinking on the boundary issue as well the totality of the bilateral relation. It needs to be recognized that 1962 needs to be exorcised from the psyche of the Indian politico-military establishment before a strong relationship based on mutual interests can be built.

From the Indian point of view, the other important chapter in the book is on Sino-Pak relations. The post Cold War changes in the Sino-Pak relations have been well captured in this chapter. It also makes an interesting point about non-democratic political structures in China and Pakistan being a contributing factor in maintaining a stable bilateral relationship



despite rapidly shifting domestic priorities. China-Pak nuclear nexus has been documented, but there is no explanation of *why* this nexus exists and what China stands to gain. However, the chapters on Sino-Pak relations and China's Central Asian policy, have been overtaken by events of September 11 and hence the analysis is dated.

Refreshingly, the two chapters on Chinese economy are cohesive and their arguments are well developed. Chinese economic reforms are analysed to reach the conclusion that China's rejection of the IMF-World Bank sponsored approach advocating privatization of the means of production underlies the Chinese economic success. Instead, China opted for a restructuring of the relations of production with a greater profit motive for workers and managers. This minimized the economic and social dislocation that would have followed a privatization drive. The authors also recognize that the presence of regional disparities and that the present structure of reforms, based on the principle of market socialism, might eventually lead to a capitalist form of economy.

It is an uneven book with some valid questions raised but with not enough analytical rigour to provide the answers. For example, the chapter on Sino-US relations posits that short term fluctuations can seriously disturb Sino-US ties. This is followed by a general discussion of the major irritants in the bilateral relations, namely the situation in the South China sea, National Missile Defence shield and the human rights issue. But the argument that these crises will contribute to a serious long term disruption of the Sino-US relations is not linked analytically with the evidence provided.

Finally, the book lacks an introduction that could have pulled together all the different arguments made and located them within the context of present debates about Chinese foreign policy. Inexplicably, the book ends with a chapter on Chinese women's dress as a symbol of changing political and economic priorities in China. The book is indifferently copy-edited with Chinese names often wrongly spelt and footnotes not standardized. ■

**Sonika Gupta** is a Research Scholar, Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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# An Intellectually Refreshing Exercise

A. K. Shiva Kumar

**INCLUSIVE ECONOMICS: GANDHIAN METHOD AND CONTEMPORARY POLICY**

By Narendar Pani

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 205, Rs. 380.00

Isn't it difficult to believe that economists could not even predict the East Asian crisis of 1997? Were economists caught by surprise or were they blinded by ideology? In an intellectually refreshing but somewhat complicated style, Pani sets out to expose the weaknesses of conventional economic approaches. In doing so, he builds a very compelling case for adopting the Gandhian method of inclusiveness as a guide to policy making.

What is it wrong with economic policy makers? Pani provides an answer. They are sadly trapped in the methodological madness of their models. Striving to reduce reality to a single model inevitably excludes from the analysis many crucial factors. This happens even with the most sophisticated of exercises. For instance, economists have developed General Equilibrium models to capture mathematically complex linkages to explain and predict economic outcomes. But these models have met with very limited success. This is not surprising. There can be no single comprehensive model to explain each and every outcome especially in very different situations. Abandoning such a method, some policy makers have adopted Pragmatism as a common approach. Pragmatism does enjoy flexibility, but there is practically nothing in the process that lists criteria for choosing one set of factors over another. As a result, choice gets distorted and corrupted by expediency. Crony capitalism often used to explain the East Asian crisis, for instance, illustrates how expediency favoured state support to certain business houses. Such expediency erodes the very basis of pragmatism.

If conventional economic models are not appropriate guides to policymaking, then what is the alternative? Pani argues for adopting the Gandhian method of inclusiveness that overcomes the limitation of the narrow economic method. He points out, and rightly so, that Gandhi repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance of the situational dimension in any analysis. Gandhi's ideas are therefore bound to appear distorted if taken out of context and converted into absolute principles. Pani further argues that scepticism about grand theories makes Gandhi extremely relevant to the challenge faced by economics today. After all, Gandhi transcended theory and advocated a deeper understanding of society to deal with both the known and the unknown.

As one meanders through the maze of intellectual and philosophical arguments in Pani's book, it is easy to list out the practical implications of adopting inclusiveness as a method to guide policymaking. To begin with, Gandhi believed in pluralism and a conviction that different situations warrant different actions. In other words, policymaking needs to respect diversity and the importance of people making informed choices. Gandhi also believed in the primacy of action. To that extent, the focus of policymaking must be on actions needed to achieve a desired consequence. However, policy makers must take into account all factors that influence the consequence.

An action can be justified only by the goodness of its consequences. In other words, the goodness of consequences automatically implies the goodness of the action as well. Policy makers clearly need to establish standards of relative morality in order to ensure 'good' consequence. However, relative morality standards must not be set at unrealistically high levels. Otherwise, there will be a tendency among policy makers to discard morality altogether on the grounds of being pragmatic. Also, relative morality must not promise rights a society cannot deliver or unwilling to protect. Indeed, the best way to define standards is through a bargained consensus. If people involved in the consensus are not seen as attached to the fruits of that consensus, there is greater chance of their judgements being considered fair.

Policy making from such a perspective calls for selectivity, judgement and prioritization. In exercising the crucial role of judgement, subjectivity ought not be discarded. Actions cannot be based only on what is objectively known at a point of time. Again, policy making requires a deep conviction in the actions being proposed. However, faith in one's own actions cannot get precedence over reason. Faith will play a role only where the justification cannot be provided by reason alone. Gandhi was also clear that any yardstick for assessment has to be necessarily pro-poor. In the famous talisman that he gave the world, he states: "... Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, try the following expedient: recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man whom you may have seen and ask yourself whether the step you contemplate is



going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his life and destiny?"

From a practical standpoint, these principles of inclusiveness derived from Gandhian thought make ample common sense which policy makers tend to ignore. For example, Pani illustrates this feature through an incisive analysis of the economic actions spelt out in the Budget of July 1991 – the first in the era of economic reforms. He points out how political compulsions and expediency in policymaking forced Manmohan Singh to neglect the interests of the poor or the long-term prospects of sustaining growth.

Why does this happen? Is it entirely the fault of economics or the economic method? It is somewhat difficult to accept Pani's caricaturing all economists as model builders. It is equally hard to accept reduction of the entire discipline of economics to model building. If anything, model building is an obsession of a small group of neo-classical economists who have an inexplicable faith in statistical validity and mathematical expressions. But they have seldom swayed hearts and minds. For centuries, the most influential economists—Adam Smith, Karl Marx, or even Amartya Sen—have dealt broadly and comprehensively with the problems of society. Embedded in their analysis is not only an element of inclusiveness, but more critically an understanding of the political economy of decision making. This is not adequately dealt with in Pani's analysis.

From a policy makers' viewpoint, however, the real challenge lies in adopting an inclusive method that can be practical, honest and truly unbiased. In a sense, Gandhi appealed to the spiritual and moral core within people to put in place policies that would bring about a radical transformation in the daily lives of ordinary people. But with the growing insensitivity to inequality and discrimination, and the weakening of the moral fibre everywhere – especially in politics and in the bureaucracy – the reader is left wondering if there are policy makers to whom this book will appeal. After all, it is policy makers who should be reading this book. ■

A.K. Shiva Kumar is an economist working with UNICEF.



# Sociology of Learning, Participation and Development

Satyajit Singh

**WATER FOR PABOLEE: STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIMALAYAS**  
By Robert C. Alter  
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 240, Rs. 450.00



This is a book written by a missionary about thirteen years (1981-94) of his life and developmental work in the Chamasari Gram Sabha near Mussourie. It is a book based on anecdotes and stories about people and their relationships with each other, their resources, the state and external agents willing to contribute to their development. It is as much a story of charitable institutions of the Church and the passion of individuals within it to make a difference in the lives of the people they share their surroundings with. It is also an honest narrative of the Church and the debates within it on the nature of its interventions, not just for Christian families, but also to bring about what is being termed as 'integrated development'. It also brings to the fore the humility with which the Church regards its work and the managerial qualities that it can bring to the people in comparison to many other non-governmental organizations that have sprung up in the UP hills. In narrating these stories the author makes good his long experience and expertise in community development to communicate in a simple manner some complex issues that are at the heart of natural resource management and development in the state of Uttaranchal.

As one begins reading the book one gets the feeling that the author is trying to do too many things at the same time and the impression that the book can be best described as the author's memoirs. However, one is soon engrossed in the stories and anyone who has worked in rural India would soon begin to relate it to their experiences with real people, genuine issues, constraints, and small but significant victories. Around these stories evolves a perspective of development, a sociological narrative of the life and economy

While the NGOs like MGVS have demonstrated their commitment to alleviate rural poverty, how replicable is this model of NGOs working in a small cluster of habitations as an institutional solution for dealing with issues around rural poverty and development?

of the hill people, an insight into the everyday interaction between the state and the people, and importantly, a realization that good development is all about capacity building at the village level. The task of capacity building is not so simple that it can be implemented with one government order, but requires a protracted interaction with people and is dependent on the professional skills that are available for building local capacity. It is here that organizations like the Church, as indeed many NGOs, have an edge over the government as they are able to attract and retain professional expertise that are better equipped to understand rural India and the needs of the people.

While it is an acknowledged fact in the Indian context that the state looks after the developmental needs of the people, it is significant that in the thirteen years of work that has been documented here, there is little help from the state. While a faceless state cannot provide the human touch to the poor like the NGOs, the book narrates innumerable instances where the lower echelons of the bureaucracy sabotage well-meaning programmes of the state due to rampant corruption, insensitivity and indifference to the plight of the poor. While the Indian middle class in cities are fast forgetting their agony in dealing with government service monopolies like the telephone and postal departments, one can only imagine how an illiterate dalit widow has to negotiate with an upper caste bureaucracy to claim certain benefits critical for her livelihood that the state has accorded her. It is heartening to know that there are institutions like the Mussourie Gram Vikas Samiti (MGVS), to which the author belongs, in rural India that can spare their staff for a couple of days to negotiate with the bureaucracy on behalf of such poor and vulnerable people.

The book revolves around issues of collective action and documents a wide range of programmes and interventions, some immensely successful like that of providing water and others not taking off anywhere like a few employment generation schemes. Apart from experiences and theories on collective action, the book is about people, and documents their lives, the opportunities, failures and rewards over more than a decade. These

stories would be valuable to a wide range of audience – sociologists, political scientists, geographers, economists, administrators, evangelists and the field level developmental worker.

The book also throws up larger questions about rural development for policy makers, for which there are no easy answers. While the NGOs like MGVS have demonstrated their commitment to alleviate rural poverty, how replicable is this model of NGOs working in a small cluster of habitations as an institutional solution for dealing with issues around rural poverty and development? Should groups like the MGVS continue to ignore the state or should the people demand a more participatory and accountable state? As long as the state in India combines in itself the roles of policy maker, implementer as well as the regulator, can rent seeking by government employees be curbed? Time and again it has been demonstrated that institutions such as MGVS are more effective than the state in rural development and it may be time for the state to concentrate on policy and legislate for good governance, leaving the implementation at the local level. What is the appropriate local level? Is it groups like the MGVS? How will they be regulated? Would these NGOs be open to transparency and accountability that they demand of the state? Or should we direct all their energies to institutionalize the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment that mandates governance at the local level by a village panchayat. Can one expect such a huge task from a village panchayat that does not have accountable and transparent institutions or the capacity for the same and currently does little more than mimic the petty corruption that exists in the government? One hopes that answers to all these issues will come out of similar rural musings from a growing army of dedicated institutions who are striving to make a difference in rural India by building local capacity and local institutions for self-governance. ■

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# A Remarkable Work

Girdhar Rathi

## THE LAST WILDERNESS: A NOVEL

By Nirmal Verma. Translated from the Hindi by Pratik Kanjilal  
Indigo Publishing, Delhi, pp. 296, Rs. 295.00

Did I detect a note of exultation in the editorial voice over the telephone, asking for a review of *The Last Wilderness*? Yes, indeed.

The enthusiasm so communicated, over the quality of translation, was infectious. Beginning with the first sentence, lasting till the final one. It would seem that in Pratik Kanjilal, Nirmal Verma has found his ideal translator. He is alert, sensitive, knowing, in both the languages, Hindi and English. Though it has often been remarked that among the prominent writers, Nirmal's Hindi lends itself much more willingly to its English rendering, than, say, that of Krishna Sobti or Manohar Shyam Joshi, or, toughest of all, Phanishwarnath Renu, though so far only two or three of his (Nirmal's) translators seem to have availed themselves of this facility.

Pratik Kanjilal has made the best possible use of Nirmal's idiom and syntax etc. amenable to the temperament of English. At the same time, he has acted as a free agent, taking liberty necessary to any creative translation.

One of the curiosities of the English language, though, is that it acts, or seems to act, like a leveller: numerous nuances of an Indian language could simply be levelled off in translation. For example, the reverential mode of address so common in our common parlance is impossible to capture in English. As a matter of act, it is difficult to know why the narrator (in this novel) himself is so very reverential while addressing, or talking about, practically all major actors in the story: Mehra Saheb, his two wives, his daughter, the German woman Anna settled in that particular Indian hilly town, Niranjana Babu, Singh Saheb, and the last man encountered towards the end, possibly a ritualist priest. All of these are addressed as "Aap" or talked about in the plural honorific pronouns ("Ve") and verbal constructions. On the other hand, the serving types, Muralidhar and Hiralal, for example, are

simply "Tum", both in pronoun and in verb. The translator has had to reduce them all to "you", singular, egalitarian mode. All he can rescue from this differential treatment of the actors is a deferential "Ji" (for "Yes! Sir/Madam") from the servants, and the narrator too. It would seem that only the royalistic note is allowed a "We" instead of "I" in English, for differentiation from the "other", the laity. In Hindi, on the other hand, "We" for a first person singular cuts both ways: it could be a royal or a hubris-ridden elevation, or a perfect show of modesty, the egoistic "I" merging imperceptibly with the ego-free common masses. The present English text, however, would hardly raise any qualms of this linguistic type and the attendant socio-cultural niceties and significations, to be encountered by the reader of the original text.

There may arise yet another curiosity in the mind of the reader of both the texts: Nirmal Verma or his narrator in his *Antim Aranya* displays a pronounced amount of hesitancy in utterance, a tentativeness in assertion, all the time assailed by a gnawing sense of vulnerability in naming names, so to say. This gives the text a certain tone—resigned, languorous, detached. The English translation has done away with quite a few frills, rendering the description rather crisp and pointed, and if one could so call it, smart. This minor (or major?) transformation in the inner tone of the narrative makes the reading easier and more interesting. The aura of mystery, arousing the reader's curiosity like in a detective novel, is thus enhanced in the translator's relatively faster pace.

The brief "Notes" at the end, together with a few lines of explanatory background to the rather thin line of narration in the novel, does help the reader with the local words used, rather unfamiliar in English. And so, a Delhi man of thirty-seven years of age, taking up a job of a private chronicler with a retired civil servant living up in a hilly town (someplace like Shimla) recalls his days and months (years?) of an uncanny experience, fragment by fragment. As would be obvious to readers privy to the reviews and discussions of *Antim Aranya* on its publication some two years ago, the fascination lies not in the plot or character-delineation, but in the peculiar "encounter" with a "sense of life or existence" hard to capture or explicate. Like all Nirmal creations,

Pratik Kanjilal has made the best possible use of Nirmal's idiom and syntax etc. amenable to the temperament of English. At the same time, he has acted as a free agent, taking liberty necessary to any creative translation.

herein too, the reader finds himself or herself caught between two poles—an almost concrete, palpable imagery and musical word-craft, grappling to convey the ineffable, practically unknowable, drift of it all.

We know very little about Mehra Saheb who employs the youngish adult from Delhi, very little about his first wife who was either murdered or died a natural death; hardly much about Diva, the second, very young Christian wife who dies of cancer. And similarly is our knowledge about Tiya, the daughter, a doctor apparently serving the village folk, highly restricted. The narrator at one moment seems to be wanting to know and tell more, but the very next moment his own appetite for questioning, finding out, or knowing disappears. On the one hand, it seems the fragments that our entire existence is, are unlikely ever to be composed into a whole. On the other hand, the quest for wholeness itself appears senseless.

And yet, among the cast—including the mysterious German woman Annaji and the plantation-owner former teacher of philosophy, and the medical doctor—a strange kind of kinship develops and survives. The young man from Delhi, we find, has in spite of himself grown all too fond of his employer, Mehra Saheb, whose last rites he must perform. The immersion of his ashes, (there are ritualistically invited crows of deliverance on the bank of the river Sarpa), also seems to deliver him of an "uninvited" burden on his soul or self. (But which soul or self, we may be tempted to ask, for the self here is often shown to be divided, at least in two parts, in almost all major actors.)

As in most of his fiction, Nirmal Verma in this novel also leads his readers to reflect and muse on a number of eternal questions, in a theatre of largely unknown forces. The theatre is vivid with human and natural presence, and yet somehow it gives the impression of a controlled laboratory ambience. Perhaps all the more fascinating, precisely because of this? The production of the book itself is an additional attraction. ■

Girdhar Rathi writes poetry and translates.

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# An Ethnographic Treasure

P.A. Krishnan

BEASTS OF BURDEN (KOVERU KAZUTHAIKAL)

By Imayam. Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom  
East-West Books, Chennai, 2001, pp. 318, Rs. 225.00

When *Koveru Kazuthaikal* appeared in 1994, it created an uncommon turbulence in the Tamil literary world. Many dalit critics railed at it and characterized it as a work of a renegade that would please the domineering classes. The non-dalit critics hailed it as a work of rare integrity that spoke truth in a raw language which set off the book's undeniable literary quality. The reason for this division is not far to seek. Without resorting to elegant ruses, the book speaks of the suffocating hierarchy that exists among the suffocated themselves. What is more, its protagonist longs for a world she has just lost—a world that had rigidly set social norms, and has just enough cohesiveness to enforce them. To her even thrall is worth pining for as it may bring with it the ephemeral, pathetic certainties that she desperately needs.

Imayam's book is a triumph because he has not trodden the familiar Tamil path of flowery overstatement. He allows his characters to speak, wail, quarrel, pray and be quiet the way they do. This not only provides the author the velleum of authenticity on which to engross his book but also makes the novel an extraordinary ethnographic treasure. The unseen thread of compassion that runs through *Koveru Kazuthaikal* ensures that it does not read like a volume of Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of South India*.

Arokkiyam the washer-woman, who serves the dalits of a Tamil village, belongs to the lowest rung of the twisted caste ladder. She and her family are ordained to live off the leftovers of the untouchables. They are all Catholics and their patron saint is Saint Anthony whom they often invoke to allow them to live their squalid, fecund lives in the mode they are familiar with. Ironic, considering that Saint Anthony is also the father of Christian monasticism. Their religion may be Christian but their rituals, myths and idioms are all Hindu and they are also indispensable when the Cheri dwellers, themselves Hindus, perform the rites of passage. The book opens with Arokkiyam visiting the Church to be overawed by the priest. She nevertheless believes that a visit from the priest to her village will set right the caste decreed customs that have gone awry—a visit that never really materializes. She watches her world slowly crumbling around her. Her son and his constantly complaining wife leave her and settle in a town. Her daughter is molested and later married to a boy whose future even in the none-too-greedy expectations of the family is

not very bright. The villagers turn niggardly. The shares due to her family get progressively diminished. Still, Arokkiyam clings to her village, constantly exhorting her husband to do likewise. The priest sends his emissary to convince her that the best choice for her younger son is to become a priest. Arokkiyam agonizes and finally says no to the emissary. The boy however has other ideas and runs away from her. Her son-in-law is bitten by a snake and he dies. In a moving final page the mother and her widowed daughter resume the trudge to the thorapaadu, the washing ghat.

Arokkiyam is without doubt one of the most memorable characters in Tamil fiction. Lakshmi Holmstrom who has translated this book into English rightly says in her introduction that dalit women in literature usually did not challenge nor change greatly the nature of the functions and duties that were traditionally theirs. The portrait of Arokkiyam is in that tradition, but at the same time different from the symbolic archetype. She is not described objectively but from within; from the perspective of her own dilemma, within the terms of her own anguish.

This is one of her laments:

Even if this place becomes a garden overrun by dogs, a park full of ghosts, a town watched by a demon, even if all these people leave it and go away this stream is not going to abandon me and go away. Nobody is going to claim these rocks as theirs and carry them away. So why should I worry? Whose companionship do I need? Why should I leave my home to look after the handspan-sized stomach? We will see who is more important, my stomach or myself. O Saint Anthony! Has it been just yesterday and today, just a couple of days? It is here in this thorapaadu that my corpse will lie.

This passage dramatically illustrates the perils that a translator has to face. The fragility of Imayam's dialect is such that it will lose most of its charm and vigour even in carefully rendered Tamil. Translating it into English makes it infuriatingly trite; or insufferably posh which the suffixed 'da's and 'di's' are unable to coarsen.

Lakshmi deserves respect for undertaking this stupendous task. ■

P.A. Krishnan, a senior officer with the CSIR, is a writer. His first novel *The Tiger Claw Tree* (Penguin) has been translated into Tamil by the author. He is currently working on his second novel.

# An Evocative Novella

Seetha Parthasarathy

THE VISITING MOON

By Susan Visvanathan

Indialnk, 2002, pp 153, Rs 250.00

Single women in fiction usually make for a lot of dramatics. They're either full of mystery or despair, usually emotionally on the edge, and reading about them inevitably leaves the reader feeling a bit drained. So it is with a sense of trepidation that one picks up *The Visiting Moon*.

In this slim novella, Susan Visvanathan goes into the life and mind of Rashmi, a 45-year-old divorced writer of pulp fiction, who is self-confessedly of no use to anyone and incapable of giving herself totally to any relationship. "This blindness of emotion was my greatest handicap . . . I was incapable of loving." That takes its toll on her marriage, which she goes through in a semi-conscious trance-like state.

She then lives out her life as a single woman, leading a lone, not lonely existence, self-content and absorbed in herself even as she discusses wedding, funerals and the price of mangoes with sundry neighbours. Her ex-husband and his wife keep a benign, if somewhat exasperated, eye on her, her teenage sons visit her regularly and she does manage that regular holiday to Ranikhet. She writes because she needs the money, not because she had a creative urge. "I had no urges—I lived as softly as waves upon water on some obscure and timid beach, lapping at other lives as anonymous as my own." Into her routine, drab life comes a younger Rakesh, "who had a great deal of life about him—an animal warmth and passion that infused my person". But this doesn't change Rashmi's life forever but it is merely "lit up by an inconsequential friendship, a barely incendiary passion."

And yet Rashmi is the object of envy, of her husband's second wife and a more devoted mother to her two sons than Rashmi could ever be.

There are no dark pasts, no emotional maelstroms, no demons to be chased, no catharsis in Rashmi's story. It's easy to identify with Rashmi, even if you're not single or divorced or the mother of two. Especially when she writes, "The odd thing about survival is that one does it anyhow."

Nor are there any literary flourishes on Visvanathan's part. Barring one attempt at a novel within a novel, which jars terribly. This is a quintessential quotidian tale which could have become a mediocre effort with pedestrian writing. Visvanathan's simple but evocative style, with touches of droll humour, lifts the novella a notch above the ordinary. ■

Seetha Parthasarathy is a freelance writer.

# A World of Dichotomy

Lakshmi Subramanyam

THOSE WHO HAD KNOWN LOVE (JARA BHALOBESECHHILO)  
By Anita Agnihotri. Translated from the Bengali by Rani Ray.  
Srishti Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 204, Rs. 145.00

*Those Who had Known Love* is Anita Agnihotri's second novel and establishes her as a significant literary figure in Bengali. Her poems were published by Satyajit Ray in his monthly *Sandesh* in 1969. *Those Who had Known Love*, is of special interest as it fictionalizes her experiences as a member of the Indian Administrative service. The Author's Preface explains that the central protagonist Rukmini and her childhood friend Phalgun represent "Calcutta of the seventies," and confesses that the novel has captured "a lot of my own self though it is not autobiographical."

The novel is set in the National Academy in Mussorie where young people are ostensibly trained to govern. In a series of deft sketches the author shows the diversity of India, as young men and women interact with each other and find it difficult to get rid of their inherent prejudices—a baggage they carry with them, even when they encounter the grim reality of rural India. The narrative unfolds on several levels, but central to the novel is the relationship of Ruku and Phalgun, rooted in childhood and which flowers into a deep and lasting relationship.

The events in the novel are viewed through the lens of Ruku (Rukmini). This is both the strength and weakness of the novel. Ruku is sensitive and yet views the many superficialities of Academy life with an ironic eye. This world with its "mowed lawns and immaculate clothes" (p.23) and its absurd rules

of etiquette conflicts with the world that Ruku has been brought up in. Comfortable in her simple Murshidabad sarees than in riding breeches and shirt, quiet and even a little timid, steeped in the poetry of Tagore, the author's sympathies lie obviously with her. The realistic details of Academy life give the novel a specificity but strangely Ruku finds that world unreal. The contradictions between the smart urban crowd and the complex inner world of Ruku are too vast for the heroine to bridge. The two worlds remain separate even at the end of the novel. The poetry of the Kumaon landscape with its mist and clouds seems to relate to her own feelings for Phalgun who is like a "landscape in her mind's eye" (p.12-13). For Ruku, the muck on the streets of Calcutta jostles with the Shefali flowers lying scattered on the ground. It is but natural that for her the relationship with Phalgun has a solidity that she feels is lacking in her experiences at the Academy. At one point we are told she did not feel he had a separate identity. It is Phalgun who introduces her to the world of western classical music and to evenings with Manik Da—impressions that cannot be erased.

At the Academy itself, Ruku is constantly confronted with the key question: Whose India is it? This question becomes central to the trainees' camp in the village of Pathagara. For Anita Agnihotri, her heroine can do no wrong. With dedication she goes about her work, sensitive to the problems of the villagers,

in contrast to the others who miss their favourite cigarettes, bone china cups and cornflakes. Ruku, on the other hand, notices the insensitive neutral face of the bureaucracy. She realizes that the questionnaire which is circulated does not get to the root of the problem—the facts that were "etched in his soul." (p.75). Class and caste divisions, oppression of women, poverty—every aspect of rural India is touched upon in this section of the novel. But it also foregrounds some of the problems that the reader has with the text. While the details of the training camp are obviously based on first hand experience, the moral perspective of Ruku blurs the irony and reduces many of the characters to caricatures. Not even the two traumatic events in the book—the tragic drowning of Swarup Lall and the fire that destroys the main administrative block—forces any of the other protagonists into any form of introspection.

So the crucial question remains: Which is the 'real' India? The girls and boys from English medium schools are as much part of the 'real' India, as the principled Director of the Academy who resigns. Or does the answer lie in the title of the book? Phalgun, the musician, gives more importance to relationships than to material success. Ruku and Phalgun respond to the poverty and suffering of the villagers with a sympathy and understanding that none of the other characters in the novel do. While Phalgun sees beauty and culture survive amidst poverty, Ruku struggles with the day-to-day problems of administration in remote villages. But the answer does not seem to satisfy the reader completely as the end suggests too near a solution to the complex questions raised in the novel.

Rani Ray's translation has fluidity and poetic resonance and retains the subtlety of the original. ■

Lakshmi Subramanyam teaches English at Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi.

## Towards a Poetics of Truth and Imagination

Sudhir Kumar

ANCESTRAL VOICES: FOUR LECTURES TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF IMAGINATION  
By Ramesh Chandra Shah<sup>1</sup>  
Temenos Academy, London, 2001, pp.74, price not stated.

*The poet, when he writes, is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The truth, that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy, is often not to be met within his life. The life-story of many a poet belies his poetry.*

*A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth—P.B.Shelley<sup>2</sup>*

*And in one sense, but a very limited one, he (the poet) knows better what his poems 'mean' than anyone else;...But what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a*

M.K.Gandhi (*Young India* :Nov.12,1925)

*poet may become merely a reader in respect of his own works, forgetting his original meaning." T.S. Eliot—"The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism."<sup>3</sup>*

What connects these three significant statements about the *dharma* (in the sense of connoting the inalienable nature) of poetry (or,

broadly speaking, literature) is the writer's ability to represent relative or provisional truths, (and therefore, meanings) through creative imagination in a text, while constantly engaged in the pursuit of almost unattainable, eternal Truth. Interestingly, Gandhi and Eliot, to essay an unfashionable analogy, seem to have long anticipated and stolen much of the postmodernist thunder about the death of the author and the deferral of meaning, by critiquing the processes of tying and untying the text in order to foreground the relativity of truth for the inscriber and the interpreter both. Ramesh Chandra Shah's *Ancestral Voices* is an extraordinary attempt to theorize how playfully a writer represents the world through the word by creatively interacting with *Vac* (the primal Word or in Coleridge's terms—Primary Imagination). What is important in his project is the fact that Shah's "individual talent" or "*pratibha*" (imagination) enables him to record

and recover the long-neglected "ancestral-voices" of Indic civilization. To decolonize an Indian mind, he retrieves and reinterprets the relevance of the voices of the vedic/upanishadic seers, the seer-poets of the post-vedic epic tradition, the classical aestheticians, and the protestant bhakti-poets, often juxtaposing them with the exponents of what is known as the western canon. The subtext of Shah's critical endeavour is to highlight the centrality of India's spiritual traditions in the reconstruction of the national imaginary in *marga* (sanskritik) and *desi* (oral, bhasha or popular) literature. The publication of four civilizationally significant lectures that Shah delivered at Temenos Academy, London in 1998, in the form of the book—*Ancestral Voices* is a welcome addition to the select short-list of titles that sincerely explore the meaning of India like Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*, Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundation Of Indian Culture*, Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva*, Raja Rao's *The Meaning of India*, Nirmal Verma's *Doosare Shabdon Mein*, Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy*, Partha Chatterjee's *Nation And Its Fragments* and Makarand Paranjape's *Decolonization and Development: Hind Swaraj Revisited*.

#### Towards a Poetics of Truth:

In the first chapter, "The Founding of Truth: Some Reflections on Vedic Poetry" (pp.2-21), Shah underlines the relationship between literature (art) and truth. He affirms the Vedic vision that all literary or aesthetic representations, all works of imagination emanate from "Vac" (or the Word). He interprets Vac, not merely as the tool of communication but as "the primordial mystery, combining in herself three worlds of time: past, present and future" (p.3), which reveals itself only to those who are worthy to receive her: "Yet certain ones, though seeing, may not see her/ And other ones, though hearing may not hear her/ But to some the Word reveals herself quite freely/Like a fair-robed bride surrendering to her husband" (p.4). The idea of literary work as "text" (textile—a piece of cloth) in which "poetic truth" is interwoven, Shah tells us, first occurs in Rg Veda—"May we attain the fountain-head of the Truth that you guard. Do not let the thread break while I am still weaving this thought" (pp.4-5). For a writer or a seer (they are one in the vedic epistemology), writing is a *sadhana* (spiritual making or *poiesis*) of and for Truth, which is One; but it is manifest or textualized in infinite forms by the poets. Shah illustrates this point by referring to the visions of *Uddalaka* (*Chandogya Upanishad*), Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharishi, and Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Professor J.L. Mehta. The word 'mantra', which characterizes the spirit of poetry means—"that which has been thought or known and which possesses power to liberate" (p.10). Professor

Shah explains the mantric significance of Gayatri, Ushas (dawn) and Dyava-Prithvi (heaven and earth) verses. In the second chapter, Shah reads the Indic epic poetry (the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*) and its symbology in the context of textualizing truth, self, world and cosmic order or Rta. Quoting extensively from Jung, Heidegger, Holderin and Valery, he underlines the enormous significance of Vyasa and Valmiki as writers of human and cosmic consciousness. *Rasa* or aesthetic experience in the Indic tradition is "nothing except a self-realization in terms of imaginative experience" (p.25). The nine rasas are, thus, analogous to nine primary moods or stages of self-realization induced by the functioning of imagination in a textual space. What was primarily spiritual or divine in the Vedic period, becomes "humanistic and aesthetic" (p.33) in the classical age of Sanskrit epic literature.

#### Towards a Poetics of Truth: In Theory and Practice:

In the last two chapters, namely, "Towards a Philosophy of Imagination: Hints from Indian Aesthetics" (pp.42-54) and "Bhakti Poetry: Background and Perspective" (pp.43-74), Professor Shah describes how the notions of truth (as *rasa*) and beauty unfold themselves in theory (the Sanskrit aesthetics) and practice (the example being the bhakti poetry). Imagination of the highest order is "pratibha" which "arises from the grace of *Para Vac*, i.e. the highest speech associated with the highest reality" (p.41). And therefore, Professor Shah tells the reader,—"Texts as diverse as *Bhagavatpurana*, *Yogavasistha*, *Ramcaritmanas* and the songs of the siddhas and saints exemplify this integrated co-existence and co-operation of beauty and truth" (p.42). He highlights the relevance of the amazing wealth of perennially usable critical concepts such as *rasa*, *sahridaya*, *rasika*, *ananda*, *bhava*, *vibhava*, *anubhava*, *vyabhicharibhava*, *rasanispatiti*, *asvada*, *sadharanikarana*, *camatkar*, *vyanjana*, *dhvani* etc. by analysing the views of Bharata, Sankuka, Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, Bhattanayaka, Vishwanath and others. The aesthetic experience, to quote Shah, is "thus something more than an aesthetic experience: it is a kind of rebirth, a temporary annihilation of the limited self" (p.45).

Bhakti, the very term deconstructs itself as it implies a division or separation "from The Unity of Being—and an equally intense longing for re-integration with it" (p.57). Hence, its recognition as a *rasa*. The sources of the pan-Indian bhakti movement (7<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> C A.D.) can be easily traced to the Vedas, the two epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*, its protestant character notwithstanding. Through bhakti, the poet-activists, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, made the Impersonal, the Intangible or *avyakta* (the Inexpressible) form

of the Supreme Power the personal—easily available for self-realization and the realization of certain desirable socio-cultural reforms or goals. Hence, the translation of the Upanishadic Brahma into Hari or Rama. These bhakti-poets broadbased or democratized the hitherto constricted and exclusionary spiritual space. Bhakti poetry, in this political sense also, a powerful critique of the caste-system, religious orthodoxy and ritualism which formed the bedrock of the prevailing power-relations in the medieval Indian society. The beginning of the Indian Renaissance should be traced to the Bhakti movement. Shah reminds us that Gandhiji and Tagore both were highly influenced by the emancipatory project of bhakti, which Professor Shah considers a movement from below. The bhaktas or saint-poets like the Alvars, the Nayanars, the Virshaivas, Narsi, Tukaram, Raidas, Tulsi, Kabir, Nanak, Pippa and others used bhashas (local languages) to propagate the new courage and devotion to purify the self and reform the social order—and thereby also disseminated the national imaginary among the people.

Professor Shah makes a cogent case in the book for a deeper engagement with the indigenous poetics of imagination and truth—which defies the artificial sacred/secular binary. In Indian imagination, everything in the cosmos is sacred, and can be made sacred (the meaning of sacrifice) further. This is how an Indian writer, inspired by our commonly shared ancestral voices would respond to the divisive and deadening impact of modernity which valorizes the secular over the sacred and results into the pathetic postmodernistic frenzy for self-fragmentation. It is time we shored up our ancestral voices that made Bharat, that is India, a pluralistic civilizational state. ■

#### Reference

<sup>1</sup> Ramesh Chandra Shah is an eminent Hindi poet, novelist, critic, dramatist and thinker who has recently been awarded the prestigious Vyas Samman-2000 (by K.K.Birla Foundation) for his outstanding contribution to literary criticism. His major works include—*Gobarganesi*; *Kissa Ghulam*; *Purvapar*; *Punarvas*; *Ap Kahin Nahin Rahate Vibhuti Babu* (novels), *Harishchandra Ao*; *Nadi Bhagari Aee*; *Dekhate Hain Shabda Apna Bhi Samay* (poetry), *Chhayavad Ki Prasangika*; *Vagartha*; *Bhulne Ke Viruddha*, *Alochana Ka Paksha* (literary criticism); *Mara Jai Khuro* (drama).

<sup>2</sup> "A Defence of Poetry" in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of P.B. Shelley*, New York, The Modern Library, 1951, p.499

<sup>3</sup> *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, London, Faber & Faber, 1975, p.88.

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# Voyages into the Female Mind

Swati Pal

FEVER

By Sita Pandey

Nirala Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 93, Rs. 95.00

It is a quaint kind of antithesis that the best 'short' stories are precisely the ones we wish were longer! Sita Pandey's *Fever* has the kind of appeal that film teasers have—it makes you curious to know just that wee bit more. Though set in Nepal, there is nothing unfamiliar about the characters and situations one encounters in this collection of stories. But they are nonetheless striking for the author strips off all the masks behind which the female psyche hides and offers a genuinely unhesitating insight into it.

My favourite turned out to be the story 'Nandbir'. Here the narrator (most of the stories are in the first person narrative—an appropriate strategy to personalize the episode) awaits a colleague and possible suitor, Nandbir. That inexplicable desire to have him around while acknowledging his ability to irritate, that sense of apathy and vacancy while waiting for him to arrive and the quiet desperation at his absence—this enmeshing of feelings captures the contradictory impulses that govern our relationships. Whether it is a sense of insecurity at being distanced from the expected or just that comfortable, flattered feeling when receiving attention is not stated. It is however a recognizable depiction of our mixed up minds.

Saying 'no' to sexual overtures ('Fidelity') or willingly submitting to them as being a matter of the woman's choice is articulated clearly in the stories. Not without a twist though, for the physical or mental pain at the deprivation/loading of physical intimacy is shown to often accompany the refusals or the acceptance. In two of the short stories 'Sundaria' and 'Sanction', we see the female protagonist turning into a prostitute. What hits the senses is not this act but the kind of composed and clinical way they exercise their decision to become such. Interesting too is the characterization of the male as one helpless to prevent/protect the female—in one it is the old and poor father and in the other, the ailing husband. In continuation with this departure from the conventional picture of the self sufficient dominating male, is the pitiable lover in the story 'Vain Quests' where he is literally stunted in the female protagonist's eye; he is diminished to the position of a slobbering infant craving for affection.

Perhaps the only quarrel that I have with this notion of the empowered/victimized woman is the author's persistent return to the profession of prostitution as being the only one a woman can turn to. Or is it that she is talking about a certain class/cultural milieu?

Not everything is shown from the female eye. In 'With One's Own Question Mark' the conflicts within the male protagonist's mind with its cravings for young 'Prema', his proprietary sense of ownership after helping her out, and his helplessness, may be guilt (and may be regret at opportunities he was unable to use)—is extremely well brought out. Especially, at the conclusion of the story where he is shown to be sulking around in his own shadows.

The coming to terms with the growing changes in the physical dimensions of the body; the instinctive vulnerability and the sense of violation at any attempt made to invade the body are finely and honestly expressed through the traumatized reflections of the narrator in the title story 'Fever'. What enhances the complexity of this story is the portrayal of the cruelty that children are unknowingly capable of as when the young girls pull off the narrator's frock reducing her to sheer indignity and tears.

Two other distinguishing features of these stories must be mentioned. One is the enigmatic aura surrounding of the stories. The very first in this collection, for example, entitled 'Once Upon a Time' where one can only speculate about the tragic possibilities behind the devastation of the village where Bhutaha once lived. Or again 'Looking for a Face' which is about a search certainly, but whose goal is a mystery. Could it be for an identity, a companion, a soulmate, a supporter? One can only



guess.

The other aspect is the fable like quality in the stories, notably 'The Savage Town'. While the author points at no specific moral, there is definitely a call towards the liberation of the human mind, a breaking free from all that fetters it.

Thematically the stories are well linked but there is a visible unevenness in the translations, probably an outcome of getting five translators instead of one. This is of course only a minor discomfort or distraction while reading these otherwise well explored voyages into the female mind. ■

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# Journeying Through Telugu Short Story with Women

N. Venugopal

## AYONI AND OTHER STORIES

Edited and Translated by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar  
Katha, 2001, pp. 203, Rs. 200.00

The first and the last decades of the Twentieth century Telugu society had produced both Matildas and Ayonis, with similarities and differences, continuity and change. At the one end was Matilda, a married girl from the first decade, who had to depend solely on her aged, suspecting husband and at best her identity was defined by him as a seductive beauty. Towards the other end was Ayoni, a minor girl who was kidnapped and used in the flesh trade. She thinks all her wretchedness was because of her identification with *yoni* and wants to become *ayoni*. Matilda may be silent and Ayoni might have become articulate enough to write her own story, the story is almost the same—that of a deprived and subjugated woman. If both these stories emerged from the same milieu and in a way represent the journey of womanhood spanning a century, how enlightening it would be to follow this journey, marking all the important milestones, recorded in literature? *Ayoni and Other Stories* is a volume that handholds a reader through this journey.

With about a hundred years of history and experimentation to its credit, the genre of short story in Telugu can comfortably claim its rightful place in world literature. The major drawback, however, has been the inaccessibility of Telugu literature to a non-Telugu reader. Though Telugus are famous for getting the literatures of other languages into Telugu immediately, the counterflow, at least into English, was not more than a trickle. Not many translations are available and even if there were a few, they were problematic. The translations were neither representative of the complex fabric of Telugu literature, nor of a reasonably acceptable quality. Even as the scenario started changing in the last couple of years, not much care and precision seem to have gone into the output.

It is heartening to read *Ayoni and Other Stories* in this context. The volume comes as a

The volume is an outcome of the editors' study of "the portrayal of women in the Telugu short story from Gurazada to the present." The editors emphasize that "these short stories are representative of the various issues concerning women."

great relief, despite a few problems. Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar, the editors and translators of the volume deserve to be complemented. The theme of the short story collection, as well as the stories, are carefully selected and presented in a coherent scheme. The translations in general are faithful to the originals and comprehensible to a non-Telugu reader.

The volume is an outcome of the editors' study of "the portrayal of women in the Telugu short story from Gurazada to the present." The editors emphasize that "these short stories are representative of the various issues concerning women." They also extend a caveat that the selection has been based on individual preferences. Another limitation of the volume is that the editors did not want to include the stories that had been translated earlier.

The volume consists of short stories written by Gurazada Apparao, Sripada Subrahmanyastry, Chalam, Kanuparti Varalakshamma, Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao, Rachakonda Viswanathasastry, Sivaraju Subbulakshmi, Abburi Chaya Devi, Kethu Viswanathareddy, Kavanasarma, Ranganayakamma, P. Sathyavathi, Indraganti Janakibala, Vivina Murthy, Volga and Kuppili Padma. All of them are acclaimed writers in Telugu having thrown new light and supplied new perspectives on the mundane. Their ideological positions differ but all of them had great sympathy for the suffering of half of the population and analysed the predicament in their own way. Some of the problems they took for their stories might look dated now but their treatment of the stories makes it fresh and thought provoking.

The sixteen stories in the volume might be divided broadly into two categories: those which talk about the woman's predicament in a traditional, conservative or commercialized society and those that give hope of a possible change and the emergence of a new woman. In fact, Gurazada exuded the confidence that "future generations of women will rewrite the history."

While Gurazada speaks of an aged professor who suspects his young wife, Sripada portrays the difficulties of a widow in a brahmin household. Chalam's protagonist questions the unjust law that tries a mother for abortion. Varalakshamma exposes the hypocrisy of an art-loving husband in forcing his wife to act in dramas. Kutumbarao's story



unravels the dynamics of "immorality" and enlightens the reader to understand the complexity of human relations better. Viswanathasastry lays bare the cruelty involved in the flesh trade and commodification of human body. Chaya Devi's symbolic story compares woman's life to a Bonsai and throws light on a very important aspect.

Viswanathareddy's story speaks of a new courageous woman coming up in society. Protagonists in the stories by Ranganayakamma, Sathyavathi, Janakibala, Vivina-murthy, Volga and Padma appear as the seeds of new thoughts and at times of assertion amongst the women.

There has been a controversy in Telugu literature, part of it thanks to the feminist scholarship, that the first short story was written by Bandaru Acchamamba, a woman, and not Gurazada as literary history hitherto was claiming. There were arguments both for and against and it is almost settled that Gurazada wrote the first "modern" short story, if not the first story in chronological sense. Acchamamba's stories contain, and some times reinforce, traditional ideology regarding women's status, though they were published a decade before Gurazada's 'Diddubatu' (1910), with modern ideas on man-woman relationship. It would appear strange that the editors have not touched upon this and claimed Gurazada as the first short story writer in their Introduction. The controversy would be significant in a volume devoted to representation of woman in short story.

Since Gurazada's 'Diddubatu' was translated earlier, this volume takes his 'Matilda'. The choice, however, doesn't seem right. Gurazada was in the habit of revising his texts and in that sense Matilda seems to be a raw sketch for a future story and it was published posthumously. Thus 'Diddubatu', at the cost of repetition or 'Samskarta Hridayam' would have been better choices than this story.

The editors should have given the dates of first publication of the stories rather than the publication dates of the latest available anthologies. That would have indicated the milieu in which a particular story was written. It seems that there is an uneven distribution among different decades.

Though some of the translations are excellent, and in general are good, there is some unevenness, which could have been avoided. There are a couple of problems with translation. The translators have tried to render Telugu idiomatic usages and proverbs into English as they are and they do not appear to appeal to non-Telugu readers. Idioms and proverbs are basically rooted in culture and in most of the cases they cannot be transplanted in an alien culture. Even as the translators demonstrate their fine perception of nuances of both the source and target languages, this particular aspect comes as a hitch.

In the same way, some of the Telugu words are retained intact. There is no hard and fast rule here and there have been different conventions and models in this regard.

Translators from African literatures have been taking a lot of liberty, but Indian language literatures are not used to that. At the most, nomenclature of relations (amma, naanna, chelli, baava, bharya, bharta, kooturu, mamagaru, attagaru, peddakoduku, annayya, akkayya, maama, pinni, manavaralu, tatayya, babai, ammamma – all of them from the stories) and culture-specific expressions could be retained to transmit the flavour. Though non-Telugu readers are acquainted with some of them, others need at least short explanations. Leaving words like kuncham, banti flower, parani, karivepaku, namaskaram, payasam, saman, etc. unexplained would be much more difficult.

Ridicule and contempt towards snobbish English speakers would be expressed as "speaking paas, pees" (the words do not mean anything, it is only a mimicking sound) and cannot be translated "Pass Peace".

These and some other translation difficulties do not undermine the enormous effort the translators have put in. They have done a great service to Telugu language and literature in general and woman's cause in particular. They and Katha deserve all praise. ■

**N. Venugopal**, poet, literary critic and a freelance journalist based in Hyderabad. His recent publications include *Kathasandarbhama*, an anthology of critical essays on short story.

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# Of An Age Gone By

Kalyani Dutta

**NABANKUR: THE SEEDLING'S TALE**

By Sulekha Sanyal

Translated By Gouranga P. Chattopadhyay  
Stree, Calcutta, 2001, Rs. 250.00

A generation is now in exodus, people in their nineties, taking with them all their rich memories of that most interesting and important part of our recent history, *Agniyug*, the Age of Fire, of Swadeshi Movement. To anyone who has been fortunate to live in close proximity to a representative of that era, many incidents and characters from Sulekha Sanyal's tale, echoes familiarly from nostalgic recounting of eighty year old memories. Of young uncles who practised Swadeshi with as much ardour as physical culture, of sympathetic female relatives who hid firearms, of patriarchs discomfited by invasion of a traditional household by police searches. We realize how inflamed were once the youth of Bengal for these experiences to have been so widespread. The sequel to Sunil Gangopadaya's *Sei Samay*, translated by Aruna Chakravarty as 'First Light' traverses the same period.

The classic device to catch the spirit of the time—through the eyes of a child protagonist in the form of a growing up narrative—appears here. Chobi, born in a landholding family which had controlled many indigo plantations once, is a little rebel. She is described as a little arrogant, as if ready to fight with the whole world. The story opens on an idyllic country morning, and ends with the arrest of Chobi's Swadeshi uncle Adhir, being led away in chains to be transported to the Andamans. Chobi sends a lilting cry of the forbidden Vande Mataram across the fields, after the fast dwindling backs of the police party. At various times she impatiently chides her older brother for shedding tears. Chobi is then the nine year old seedling, who by the end of the novel grows into a young tree—at the time of the infamous Bengal famine—having matriculated, travelling to Calcutta, and to college alongside romance.

In between lie many adventures, as is the norm in this genre of novels, of travel to different places. A little improbably, Chobi who is the only and adored daughter of her mother, is sent away to a faraway town with her wealthy, childless aunt, the bait held before the family being that of education. This town is probably Chittagong where Sanyal went to school herself. The Bengali name of this town, Chattagram is redolent of revolutionary glamour, home as it was of a most daring armoury raid. The thirst for education among women of orthodox households, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, recurs whenever memoirs or fictional accounts of women of

those times are broached. The stifled desire of Chobi's mother for learning, instead of which she became a household drudge, only accounts for her letting her daughter leave the ancestral house, against everyone's wishes.

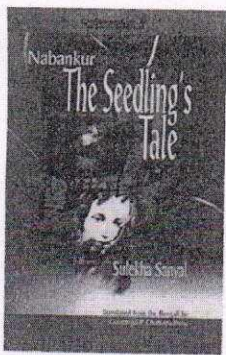
In the town Chobi meets new kinds of people, whom she befriends, true to her rebellious spirit defying her aunt's class, caste, communal prejudices. A picture of abject levels of poverty she encounters in the family of a low level court employee whose daughters wander the shrubberies of Chobi's town house, away from their fiercely embittered mother. Then there is Paribanu, eking out her lessons at school by massaging an old rich woman. Once again appears the motif of a desire for education as a panacea for all ills of female existence.

One of the elements which makes this tale absorbing are the eccentric characters Chobi encounters. She is intensely curious about people. There is her Christian friend Minu, whose loyalist mother is annoyed at the Swadeshi sympathies displayed by her school-going son. A young man comes to live in a house nearby, who sings all day long, does no work or study. Perhaps Chobi associates with all these people who in that period would have been quite out of the pale for a girl of a conservative home, to escape the stifling tension of her aunt's unhappy marriage.

This sojourn comes to an end with the beginning of the Second World War. Chittagong we remember was quite close to the Burmese theatre of war. The middle classes flee. Her uncle's business fails. Chobi returns to her village, to find her uncle returned from Andaman with virulent consumption. As far as motivation is concerned it is a little difficult to understand why Chobi declined returning to her mother when a chance had offered earlier. She had not been at all willing to come to town at first.

However Chobi's return to the village enables Sanyal to show the crumbling hold of feudalism. To keep the cumbersome family fed, Chobi's father has had to take to trade, much despised by the family. Adhir on his deathbed, forbidden visits by the family's children, ignored by Chobi typically, yet keeps the revolutionary fires burning. When the infamous famine begins his followers set up a committee to feed the people. Defying the family once again Chobi joins them. Neither starving nor solitary confinement will make her submit to an arranged marriage.





No doubt much of Chobi's tale is an autobiographical account by Sanyal who died at thirty-seven. Susie Tharu, the series editor, writes in the Foreword that when this novel was first published it was not well received, because of its feminist content. In that respect the table has been turned. Sanyal through Chobi shows strong empathy for many women both in the village and in the town, deprived in various ways by life. She is attracted to those who fight for their love and ideals, such as Maya who loved Adhir, who was rescued by villagers from slavery in a relative's house. The seedling's tale is worth reading for the lively creation of its main protagonist, the action filled narrative of an eventful period and the evocation of not only East Bengal's verdant landscape but ruins and haunted places bound to call to an inquisitive young personality. Chobi takes us all along with her in her journey of discovery of life and people. ■

Kalyani Dutta teaches in Indraprastha College, Delhi University, Delhi.

## Documenting a Genre

Pushpinder Syal

REPRESENTING WOMAN:  
TRADITION, LEGEND AND PANJABI DRAMA  
By Pankaj K. Singh  
Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2000,  
pp. 192, Rs. 325.00

This is probably one of the first really well-documented studies written in English on the subject of Panjabi drama, its background in legend and myth and its contemporary concerns. The research done by Pankaj Singh draws on work done in diverse areas – theories of myth, history of folk traditions in India, postcolonial and feminist viewpoints, drama criticism and performance etc. Chapters I and II situate Panjabi drama in the framework of the historical development of legends – the Kissas – in Panjab, and the ongoing process of

reworking these traditions in their struggle to accommodate modernity. The title of the book has a deliberate hyphen in the word 'representing', which is in tune with the current terms and credos of 're' doing everything, and particularly the breaking up of words to 're-present' their formative structures. A major section of the book is devoted to the discussion of the legends of Hir Ranjha and Mirza Sahiban and their reconstructions in modern Panjabi drama. While the pointing out of misogyny in the traditional legends of love is itself hardly exceptional since the misogyny is overtly stated in clear terms in these texts and their different versions, it needed reiteration in the coherent and organized way in which Singh has discussed it.

However, one of the gaps in the discussion is the linking of this misogyny and misrepresentation to the conditions of the time. For instance, in describing the presentation of characters such as Hir and Ranjha in the works of Waris and Damodar, Singh shows through ample illustration that Hir has not been portrayed justly in contrast to Ranjha, and this is because Waris was steeped in patriarchal ideology and could not get beyond it. As an observation, this is acceptable enough. The writer mentions the richness of the Hir Waris text in describing the social world and customs of the time. Surely there must be a connection between these, the associated practices of commodification of women along with land and wealth and the perception of gender. Gender formation in feudal communities, linked with processes of individuation in the community as a whole, has to be understood more clearly if we wish to understand the formation of characters like Hir and Ranjha in these legends and how their love relationships are seen to unfold. We would wish to know more about how exactly the patriarchal ideologies were working in that milieu to necessitate the extreme judgements that Waris is said to have made, and how legend itself evolves as a structure to carry and maintain these ideologies. Could readings be made to subvert the declarative surface of these texts? According to Singh, the 'sub-versions' (to use the same techniques of hyphenation) of the patriarchal versions of the legends are made by contemporary dramatists. This raises the delicate question of what exactly 'subversion' consists of. If today's dramatists reinstate different images of the protagonists in the legends, putting women in a more central and positive role, they are doing so in a present-day context and a largely urban and literate milieu in which this is kind of correctional exercise is expected anyway. What is so terribly subversive about it? And besides, could such 'sub-versions' be found within the traditional texts themselves – perhaps by looking carefully at the internal linguistic and structural cues other than the overt declarations? Or through performance? (an example is of Shakespearean

According to Singh, the 'sub-versions' (to use the same techniques of hyphenation) of the patriarchal versions of the legends are made by contemporary dramatists.

texts being given new significances in these ways while retaining their overt textual form) Perhaps that could also help us to answer the question as to whether legends in general are linear structures or whether they have complex layers (as Ruth Finnegan has observed in the case of oral poetry, its straightforward rhythms and proverbial structures are aligned to community belief and wisdom). Indeed, in her 'Afterword' Singh does consider this possibility. In comparing legend and drama, she finds that legend has a 'sweeping power' and a 'wider base' in community life than drama which has a more select and literate audience though it has a rationalist humanist preoccupation. This is worth exploring further. There might be a greater connection between the ideology that we find in the legends and the pre-literate communities they are located in and the plays which locate themselves to a more 'thinking' public. The latter do not really interpenetrate into the mythic world, and perhaps this indicates deeper splits in the vision of each mode of representation, and indeed in the visualization of gender as well. Singh interprets it as a shift from romanticism to realism, but one wonders if it is just that, or more. Because if myth is indeed inter-penetrative, then it would not respect these categories at all, it would still be simultaneously present even in an apparently 'realist' transformation. Such are the questions that this subject raises.

As regards the achievements of the contemporary dramatists, it can be said that there are limits to which the use of archetypes from myth and legend can be pushed. A very obvious juxtaposition of the ways in which earlier figures in legends were presented and the ways in which the 'new' playwrights are doing it, can sometimes be counter-productive. It places in focus a very conscious kind of intertextuality which develops into a kind of prop on which characters can be hung. To live, the characters must have their own autonomy, even if at other levels they may be suggesting or referring to the characters of previous texts. However, the experimentation that is being done is salutary. The works of today's Panjabi dramatists are a struggle against the current of centuries, and thus no easy task. Pankaj Singh, in highlighting some aspects of their achievements, has done a job which will surely be seen as a significant contribution to the effort. ■

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# Depicting Society

Tapan Basu

BALIKA BADHU : A REPRESENTATIVE ANTHOLOGY OF BENGALI SHORT STORIES

Translated by Manish Ranjan Chatterjee  
Rupa, New Delhi, 2002, pp.334, Rs.195.00

To begin at the beginning, the list of contents contains nothing to indicate that this "representative anthology of Bengali short stories" is not a random anthology of short stories in Bengali. In fact, all the short stories are listed without the names of their authors being mentioned at all. This is likely to pose a problem for readers who wish to acquaint themselves with the genre of the Bangla golpo through a systematic study of each of its notable exponents.

Some of these exponents are indeed introduced to the readers in the "Introduction" by the translator—introduced by name as well as by their locations in the history of the short story in the Bangla language. It then becomes evident that almost every important short story teller in Bangla till the middle of the twentieth century, since Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, the pre-eminent Bangla short story teller who wrote at the turn of the century, has been represented in this anthology.

The title short story by Bimal Kar, a much younger author than Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, in a sense takes the readers of the anthology back to the older author's milieu within which the institutions of marriage and family are shown to be the sites of cultural contention. The protagonist's father, a venerable old patriarch of 'noble' stock reacts to what he perceives to be the signs of moral decay in the society around him by seeking to re-iterate and re-emphasize some of that society's 'pristine' values.

One such value is the value of conjugal felicity which according to the father is best attained through adolescent unions of girls and boys. At the age of sixteen years, the protagonist is therefore married off to Rajani, his betrothed, who is fourteen years of age. The wedded couple's odyssey from innocence to experience forms the substance of Bimal Kar's narrative, which is unequivocally affirmative of the social attitudes of Shashadhar Sinha Mahashay, "I offer my pranams to my dearly departed father with the utmost gratitude. By his grace, this life has been filled with immeasurable treasures." If Bimal Kar's short story implicitly and explicitly endorses, and even eulogizes, the gender and caste hierarchies in the Bengali society that he depicts, the two short stories by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Abhagir Swarga' and 'Mahesh', insistently interrogate the inequities of this society. The inequalities between classes and communities are the focus of 'Mahesh' in which Ghaffoor, the poor Muslim tenant, is exposed to exploi-

tation by the rich caste Hindu landlord and his lackeys. In 'Abhagir Swarga', Kangali's mother pathetically dreams of attaining a heaven which will release her from her plight of being born as an outcast woman and having to bear the humiliations heaped daily on her for being woman as well as outcast. Unfortunately for her, however, even this token transcendence is not allowed to Kangali's mother because Kangali, her son, lacks the means of given her a 'proper' cremation.

The lives of insignificant people, such as Kangali's mother and Ghaffoor are also the subject of short stories by the so-called "teen Barruije" or the "three Bandopadhyays of Bengali literature of the famous Kallol period of the 1920s and the 1930s, namely, Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay, Tara Shankar Bandopadhyay and Manik Bandopadhyay. The three writers are represented in this anthology by one short story each. Each short story is distinguished by its deployment of social realism in its narrative. 'Puin Mancha' by Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay is about the life and the death of Khenti, the girl child of an impoverished rural household, whose transition, through marriage, to the status of an adult woman is fraught with tragic results. Tragedy is inevitable too in the struggle-ridden existence of Tarini Majhi in the short story 'Tarini Majhi' by Tarashankar Bandopadhyay. The brave boatman is finally forced into choosing between saving his own life and the life of his beloved bride from certain death in the ferocious floods which flush their village. 'Level Crossing' by Manik Bandopadhyay, is about the crossroads in the life of Keshav, the professional chauffeur, who is perpetually poised in tension between the physical comforts offered to him by his employer's residence in the city and the emotional closeness which he enjoys with his family and friends in the suburbs.

Another short story by another Bandopadhyay, Saradindu, breaks the mood of gloominess generated by the social realism narratives by providing the readers an encounter with a supernatural experience woven around an attempt on the part of some people to communicate with the dead.

The short stories of Balaichand Mukhopadhyay – pseudonym Bonophool – introduces a different flavour again to the anthology. These short stories, seven in number, are actually "micro-stories", as the translator calls them. Bonophool's short stories, including 'Taj Mahal', the longer short story, are about



moods rather than about episodes. The devotion of a caring husband towards an ailing wife, the despair of a beautiful bride who returns to her parent's home after being blinded at her in-law's, a zamindar's mourning for his bovine 'mother' – each tale encapsulates an emotion in all its emotiveness.

This anthology of short stories ends with the short story 'Ekta Shatrur Kahini' by Narayan Gangopadhyay, in my opinion, the most nuanced of all the short stories in this anthology. The conflicting approaches to their mission on the part of padre Donalds and padre Hans is at the core of the plot. While the senior padre regards the native population among whom he is located with imperialist disdain, the junior padre responds to them with disarming intimacy. The face-off between Hans and Donalds reaches a climax when the latter expels the former from the Church for his 'treachery'. The renegade, who loves Indians more than he does Christianity, acquiesces readily to his excommunication from the Christian fold and joins the 'heathen' bands. His 'heathenism' is intolerable to the administrative establishment of the British government as well, which immediately declares him an enemy of India citing his German identity and the fact that Germany is engaged in a war against British India. The irony of this indictment of Hans is brought into sharp relief at the end of the short story when the same authorities who have arrested Hans are shown to be busily appeasing the local 'gods'. The Kali Puja in the same district in which the Church is engaged in winning converts from Hinduism, has the full sanction and support of the British Indian officialdom which will leave no stone unturned to win its war against the Germans. Who, then, is whose enemy and why, is the confusing and confounding issue that confronts readers of this short story as it arrives at its inconclusive conclusion.

Thus comes to a close an eclectic collection of short stories in Bangla, readable in its parts, but as the translator himself acknowledges in his "Introduction", a somewhat too selective a selection on the whole. ■

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## A 'Quest' Novel

Sayantana Dasgupta

FOUR CHAPTERS : RABINDRANATH TAGORE  
Translated by Rimli Bhattacharya  
Srishti Publishers, 2002, pp.149, Rs 195.00

**F**our Chapters claims to be the first complete English translation of *Char Adhyay*, Rabindranath's last Bangla novel. The only other extant English translation was serialized in 1936-1937, and published in book form in 1950, and was extensively edited to cater to a foreign readership.

*Four Chapters* is a quest novel; it embodies an introspection regarding the relationship between the individual and nationalism, particularly in the context of the tempestuous decades immediately preceding Independence.

*Four Chapters* is Ela's story. Ela is a rebel. Her gullible father and abusive mother make for an unhappy family life; she grows up with the conviction that "girls were made ready for marriage through a process that completely crippled their self-respect and stifled all individual notions of right and wrong". When Indranath walks into her life, she is quite ready to take an oath of celibacy and pledge her life to the nation.

The rest of the novel deals with Ela's attempts to understand the underground movement, the compromises and convictions that characterize it, and, finally, to reconcile her *swabhava* and her *swadharna* with her pledge and the commitment implied therein. Uma is freed from her pledge and ordered to marry Bhogilal. This, Ela realizes, is done to ease the two out from the movement because they have been found wanting, and also to forestall the exit of Sukumar, Uma's beloved, whom, Indranath feels, the movement needs. She also wakes up gradually to the fact that

she, like the others of her group, is always under surveillance. Those in charge of the movement are always on the lookout for members who need to be eliminated.

But *Four Chapters* is also Atin's story. Atin has been drawn to the movement by Ela's charms. The two are in love with each other, neither is able to compromise the pledge they have taken. Through the travails of Atin and Ela, and through the tale of their troubled relationship, readers discover how manipulative and ruthless the movement can be, how Ela's sexuality is exploited by the movement, and how the revolutionaries are mere puppets controlled by the leaders.

Structurally, *Char Adhyay* consists of a Prelude (*Bhumika*) and four chapters. The first chapter introduces us to the mechanics of the movement through the conversations between Indranath and Kanai Gupta, and between Indranath and Ela. It also hints at how members of the movement are mere puppets, bound to the cause and controlled and eliminated as necessary. This idea is developed further in the second chapter where Atin argues that being betrothed to the nation goes against Ela's *swadharna*, goes against a higher truth, and says the only job of all the revolutionaries was to dance "the same steps at their leaders' command". He himself appears to belong to their ranks as he walks out of the room as soon as he gets a coded message from the leadership telling him to do so.

The third chapter is set in Atin's hideout. The Ela-Atin debate continues to the point where Ela accepts Atin's contentions, but for Atin, there is no turning back. He has not been able to turn his back on the movement in spite of his awareness of its failings and manipulateness because he has seen the singleminded dedication of his 'puppet' fellow-revolutionaries. And, the fourth chapter sees a fugitive Atin visit Ela, once again, to follow the instructions of the leadership. This chapter posits nationalism against humanism and

problematizes the claims of militant nationalism by showing how they impinge on claims of humanism. No wonder, then, that it evoked such responses: "How could our Rabindranath write such a novel? And at such a time?" (Saroj Acharya, an inmate of the Deuli camp). It politicizes the maternal figure that contemporary Indian nationalism imagined the nation as, the notions of action and free will, and posits the idea of the nation as an invention. *Four Chapters* depicts a situation where commitment has become a ritual and broaches the thesis that, perhaps, to follow the lead of those at the helm of the underground nationalist movement, to conform to their ideas unquestioningly, is to compromise. That, too, on something more sacrosanct than the construct of the nation, on the sense of being human itself.

This translation has the text of *Char Adhyay*, including the *Bhumika*, which was deleted by Tagore in the 1950 and subsequent editions of the English *Four Chapters*. This volume also carries a translation of *Abhash*, the pre-text that appeared in the 1934 version of *Char Adhyay* and was deleted from later editions, and a translation of '*Char Adhyay sambandhe Kaifia*', an article written by Tagore and published in *Prabashi* in 1935 in response to the criticism *Char Adhyay* initially faced. It also carries extensive notes and a section on translating the text. This volume obviously is of academic interest and seems to mark a shift in Srishti's policy. Also heartening is the production quality. I remember reviewing some of Srishti's early volumes and being quite appalled by the plethora of typos. That has changed for the better, thankfully; and, with Srishti continuing to focus on translating Indian literature, this change bodes well for Indian bhasha literature in English translation.

Sayantana Dasgupta is Senior Research Fellow in Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

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# Fresh Insights

Shyamala A. Narayan

EARLY URDU LITERARY CULTURE AND HISTORY

By Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 211, Rs. 395.00

The Indian Civil Service has an impressive record of scholars devoted to the study of India, its languages (especially Sanskrit) and culture. This spirit continues even after Indian independence. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (b.1936) joined the Indian Postal Service in 1958, and retired as Member, Postal Services Board, New Delhi, in 1994. At present he is Adjunct Professor, South Asian Regional Studies Centre, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. His reputation as an Urdu literary critic, theorist and translator far outshines his reputation as a poet. He was awarded the Saraswati Samman (India's biggest literary award) in 1996 for his criticism. *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* deals with Urdu from the beginnings (Masud S'ad Salman Lahori, 1046-1121) to the nineteenth century. Chapter I "History, Faith, Politics: Origin Myths of Urdu and Hindi" reveals how wrong the popular perception is, that Urdu is a hybrid language, evolved in Akbar's military camp, and used primarily by Muslims. Faruqi shows that the language used by Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) was actually Urdu. The problem is one of nomenclature – the term Urdu was popularized by the British, early Indian writers never used it. "Early names for the language now called Urdu were Hindvi, Hindi, Dihlavi, Gujri, Dakani and Rekhtah, more or less in that order, though until about the middle of the nineteenth century, Dakani continued to be the name for the language used in the Deccan. The English seem to have found a set of names of their own liking, or invention" (p.22). The term "Urdu" seems to occur for the first time in 1780; there is a reference to the "language of Urdu", where Urdu meant the court, especially Shahjahanabad.

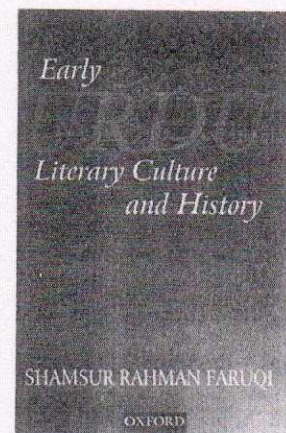
The second chapter, "Remaking History, Refashioning Culture" traces the sad history of the denigration of Urdu on "moral" and "religious" grounds. Bharatendu

Faruqi has provided many valuable insights; this book should be read by anybody who takes a serious interest in the culture, languages and literatures of India. He demonstrates the all-India character of Urdu.

Harishchandra (1850-1885), considered the "father of modern Hindi", used to write in Urdu, but switched over to Hindi, and led this attack, based on the "foreign" script of Urdu. Chapter Three describes the development of Urdu literature till the fifteenth century. Chapter Four "Literary Theory", describes the growth of literary theory in Urdu, starting with Amir Khusrau's criticism which was very influential. Chapter V, "A True Beginning in the North", discusses the different literary forms that developed in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century. The last chapter, "The 'New' Literary Culture" throws light on conventions like the "Ustad-shagird" relationship. Chapter VI is devoted entirely to Vali (c. 1665-1708), who "revolutionised Urdu poetry" by showing conclusively that Rekhtah/Hindi was capable of great poetry, which could rival, if not surpass, Indo-Persian poetry. According to Faruqi, the Delhi poets and literary historians have tried to play down Vali's achievement because "he was an outsider, and a Dakani to boot" (p.131). But the greatest injustice occurred in March 2002, when his grave in Ahmedabad was desecrated. Overnight a road was built over the site, to efface India's literary heritage.

Faruqi has provided many valuable insights; this book should be read by anybody who takes a serious interest in the culture, languages and literatures of India. He demonstrates the all-India character of Urdu. It is not a language confined to Delhi and Lucknow, early poets include Nusrat Bijapuri (from Karnataka, and no doubt having a sound knowledge of Kannada) and Vali Gujarati, who belonged to Aurangabad. Neither is it a Muslim preserve. We get a clear idea of Indian literary concepts like "Rekhtah" (= mixed, the mixture of lime and mortar used in building activity, denoting poetry in a mixture of Persian and Hindvi), *khiyal-bandi* and *kaifiyat*.

The clarity of Faruqi's style is admirable. In the debate about Urdu and Hindi being two languages, Faruqi presents other linguists' views faithfully: he clearly shows the stance taken by Amrit Rai or Suniti Kumar Chatterji. The niceties of Urdu poetry cannot be conveyed fully in translations; to explain *khiyal-bandi*, he compares the poets he has quoted to the "metaphysical poets whose poetry is characterised by what Dr Johnson described as 'forced thoughts, and rugged



metre'." (p.166). To help us get a better idea of *kaifiyat*, he writes, "It can be said that the mood of a *kaifiyat*-bearing *shi'r* recalls that of an accomplished Elizabethan lyric or song" (p.176), and goes on to quote Shakespeare's song in *Twelfth Night*, along with translations from Mir, Vali, and Siraj Arangabadi. Faruqi's wideranging scholarship is evident: a profound knowledge of Urdu literature is combined with familiarity with Sanskrit aesthetics, modern literary theories, and English literature. Faruqi draws parallels between "khiyal-bandi" and "kaifiyat" and *vakrokti* and *dhvani* respectively (p.156). When talking about the different kinds of meaning in Urdu poetics, he refers to Mammata, Anandavardhana, and Todorov. The similarities between Urdu *iham* and Sanskrit *slesha* are brought out.

There are a number of histories of Urdu literature. The earliest in English is probably by Ram Babu Saksena (published in 1927 with a foreword by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru), followed by T. Grahame Bailey's *A History of Urdu Literature* (1932). More recent work includes Mohammed Sadiq's *History of Urdu Literature* (1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1984) and Ali Jawad Zaidi's *History* published in 1993 by the Sahitya Akademi. Faruqi's work is not one more history – it takes a fresh look at early writing, and presents the distinctive features of Urdu literature and culture. The meticulous scholarly apparatus includes a ten-page list of "Works Cited" with full bibliographical details, and an index of names. Non-Urdu readers (like the present reviewer) can participate in the richness of the literature through Faruqi's quotations and sensitive commentaries. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi is a skilled translator. He makes it clear that "the verses have been chosen with a view to their amenability in translation" (p.174). The note on transliteration and use of diacritical marks help us to pronounce the names correctly. But only Urdu readers can appreciate the beauty of Adil Mansuri's calligraphy on the chapter dividers. ■

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# Thriving on Hybridity

Naila Anjum

## URDU SHORT STORIES

Edited by Rakhshanda Jalil

Srishti Publishers, Delhi, 2002. pp. 214, Rs. 195.00

Urdu short story, about a century old, has come a long way, extending its thematic concerns and gaining in technical self-assurance. If the writers of the Progressive Movement used the short story as a vehicle for social reform, the modernists used it to deal with personal anxieties and the mysterious recesses of human psychology. And the postmodern Urdu short story, like its counterpart in the West, thrives on self-reflexivity, collage, hybridity and so on. Twelve stories, some of them written by acknowledged stalwarts in Urdu fiction in India and Pakistan, are inadequate to represent a whole tradition but this anthology does present a sampling of what Urdu short story has been in the last century.

Premchand's 'The Secret of Civilisation', narrated in the first person, contrasts the attitudes of two men towards tradition. Ratnakishore is a well-educated man with an eminent government position. He embezzles government funds to carry on with his extravagant lifestyle. He does away with certain family traditions to save money, including the elaborate *Janamashrmi* celebrations. He even sets free a murderer taking a hefty bribe. Damrhi, an employee at Ratnakishore's, despite his poverty is not ready to sell his cattle for it would ruin the family's name. The poor man, caught thieving, is unable to come up with a clever answer or a bribe and gets a heavy sentence.

'The Martyr-Maker' by Manto, not one of his celebrated stories, deals obliquely with Partition and specifically with human greed. If Partition is a symbol of unbearable human suffering, events during that cataclysmic period also make us realize that there is no dearth of people who are ready to exploit human suffering for their personal greed. The protagonist is a *baniya*, a caste known for its business acumen. His business thrives, but he has an uneasy conscience. To make penance, he comes up with different ideas of charity but finds none of them good enough. On learning that people dying suddenly achieve the status of martyrs, he takes on the responsibility of helping the poor out of this wretched life and making them martyrs.

Women's writings have been represented by Ismat Chughtai's 'Some Loving Portraits', Qurratulain Hyder's 'Honour' and Hajra Masroor's 'Bhag Bhari'. The first one is not among Chughtai's best but it does contain bits of her sparkling wit and uninhibited style. It depicts the younger generation in the 70s whose values in life came into sharp conflict with those of their parents. Hyder's 'Honour' is about Shamshad Begum, a spirited young

woman and her faithfulness to Aziz Khan, to whom she was engaged. Aziz, her cousin, leaves home and squanders his wealth in the cities. After many years when he returns home she has become an old maid and cheated out of most of her fortune by her relatives. What shocks her is not that she had been betrayed but that the cousin returns with a whore for a wife, thus ruining the family's honour.

Masroor's story shows that whatever our pretensions to modernism a segment of society still lives in the medieval ages. Malik is the quintessential feudal landlord who rules ruthlessly over his subjects. When he rapes Bhag, everyone in the family seems to take it naturally. Even the police collude with him. The conflict between the values of the lady doctor, who comes from the city, and those of the feudal landlord has been brought to sharp focus through Masroor's vivid description of the responses and reactions the rape evokes in different people.

Ashfaq Ahmad, known for his apocryphal story 'Gadaria' on the theme of Partition is represented here with a sensitive story, 'Gato'. Through the central character of a kitten (*gatto* is Italian for cat), Ahmad portrays the inseparable gulf between the rich and the poor. Ram Lall's 'Sunlight on the Staircase' is readable not for its central theme but for the ethos of Urdu culture it depicts just after Partition. 'The Unwanted' by Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi is a poignant story about the relationship of an old couple with their son and ill-bred daughter-in-law. 'Circle' by Intezar Hussain is a profound story about man's thirst for achievement, quest for divinity and the mysteries of creative writing. 'Bai's Mourners' is about human greed.

Most of the stories have been rendered well by well known translators. Regrettably, some inaccuracies have crept in 'Gato' (the title should be 'Gatto'), obviously for the translator's inadequate grasp of Urdu that has led to ludicrous results. For example, on two occasions, the word *lanat* (curse) has been misread by the translator as *loghat* (dictionary). (p.82, 91). Because of this, the translator renders "Curse him!" as "Give me the dictionary"!!! And the editor lets it pass! At two other places, she totally misreads the import of an expression. She writes: "Goodness! The children of the lower orders! How stubborn and obstinate they are. Whatever their parents may try to teach them, they never budge an inch..." (p.99), whereas the original sense is that "these children stick so much to their parents' teachings that they never budge an inch from what has been told them".

Indian literatures in translation are gaining greater visibility and respectability and are being prescribed in university courses in India and abroad. Publishers should take greater care while producing such selections. ■

Naila Anjum is in Kamala Nehru College, Delhi University, Delhi.

# Baul Poetry

Partho Datta

## THE BAULS OF BENGAL

By K.M.Sen. Translated from the Bengali

by Sinjita Gupta

Writers Workshop Greybird Book, Calcutta, 2001, pp.106, Rs.150.00

Delivered as the Leela lectures at Calcutta University in 1949, this is not about the distinct and popular genre of Baul singing. Rather it concentrates on the lyrics or Baul poetry. Throughout these lectures Sen shows the close ties that it had with medieval Bhakti poetry. Divided into three sections, the book traces the antecedents of Bhakti thought in the Vedas, a comparative study of Baul poetry with other Bhakti poets and exclusively explores different Baul sects in Bengal.

Sen together with contemporaries like Hazariprasad Dwivedi pioneered the resurrection of Bhakti poets like Kabir and Dadu. Their enormous influence as writers and teachers is most dramatically manifest in the brilliant mural celebrating the lives of Bhakti poets painted by the radical Bengal school artist Benode Behari on the walls of Hindi Bhavana at Vishwa Bharati.

Sinjita Gupta's effort at translating non-fiction is to be welcomed. The last such systematic enterprise was under the editorial baton of Sujit Mukherjee at Orient Longman [which gave us excellent translations of Nirmal Bose, Buddhadeva Basu, Niharranjan Ray and others]. Gupta's good faith and enthusiasm is never in doubt but alas! the translation leaves much to be desired. I don't want to carp too much but there are numerous mistakes in syntax and punctuation, not to speak of typos. Gupta's English reads awkwardly. As a first-time translator her approach is unthinkingly literal. This would be obvious to anybody, even those who have no access to the original. Let me give a few examples. When Sen was referring to "Bangladesh" he obviously meant Bengal. Retaining the original is rather confusing since in English this refers to a nation, our neighbour to the East. Similarly a footnote on a named lecture series is translated as "speeches", sects become "sections" and so on. I have over the years built up a mental image of Professor P. Lal as a lonely craftsman, gently pottering about in his Lake Gardens house, with a Sheaffer pen tucked behind his ear carefully supervising the production. Why he does not lavish some of the same care to the editorial department?

One can't help ending this review with a trivial observation on the fate of Sen's reputation in present-day Bengal. In the 1960s and 70s when Amartya Sen was making waves abroad, he was indulgently referred by educated Bengalis as the illustrious Kshitimohan's grandson. Today Kshitimohan is only occasionally remembered as Amartya Sen's grandfather. ■

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