KAVYA BHARATI

THE STUDY CENTRE FOR
INDIAN LITERATURE IN
ENGLISH AND TRANSLATION

AMERICAN COLLEGE
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FOREWORD

Kavya Bharati has always encouraged diversity.

The current issue of our journal is no exception to this claim. You will find here the usual genre spread: poems, translations, essays, reviews. The moods of our verse cover a wide sweep as always--acid, morose, playful, reverent, meditative--otherwise it would not truly be a poetry book. Even the verse forms that our poets use here show a conspicuous variety, with a few attempts at more traditional forms, and even some use of rhyme (at least occasionally).

But the most interesting thing to notice is the variety of critical viewpoints expressed in the essays and reviews that follow here. A careful reader will find contrary critical opinions "bumping up" against each other between one review and another or between a review and an essay. And that is where the fun starts for any dedicated student of literature.

This challenge to our readers to sharpen critical awareness and sensitivity dovetails with another opportunity included in this issue of *KB* which is related to critical activity of a somewhat different nature. The "Invitation to Join the Indian Critics Survey" (p.198) should attract the attention of all serious students of literature who read our journal. *Kavya Bharati* commends this worthy enterprise to your notice and, if possible, to your participation.

Another significant event is the planned release in the foreseeable future of a special edition of *Kavya Bharati* that will give focus to the work of Indian diasporic poets. Further details are announced on page 199 of this issue. We hope in this way to give attention to expatriate Indian poets residing in several different countries.

Kavya Bharati expresses its deep gratitude and appreciation to Dr. N. Poovalingam who has given us his portrait of Tagore for use in this issue within the essay that celebrates this poet.

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KAVYA BHARATI
a review of Indian Poetry

Number 14, 2002

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General

KEKI N. DARUWALLA

BY-PASS

(1)

Now I look for a by-pass everywhere
--the black serpent, well-tarred, leaving town
after a mere show of circumambulation,
sliding along the curve and yet not fully round;
leaving the city, shuttered with dogma,
its pretences, wafer-crisp, slowly peeling;
leaving those wise counsels behind, “Gather
yourself, get a hold over your feelings.”

“Look east when you pray” (what makes them think I do?)
and such injunctions from adherents of the text.
(I can’t think of directions, I only think of you).
There are others, well-meaning, less circumspect
Who say give rein to your feelings. I smile,
I’d unfurl my passions were there any left.

(2)

Hence cautiously, in the middle lane, between
demonology and miracle, both whizzing past,
I drive, yet unsure if I’ve broken away
and am moving into loneliness at last.
When you can’t face up to dust and people
and memory that stalks you, this could mean flight.
Greater people have moved into ashrams, cults
and things, so why should I be denied

a change of course?
and this sudden hold on the suddenness of grief?
If the lease on faith is over, why the remorse?
And yet, this always happens, for a brief
moment the rear-view-mirror confounds:
are you moving into or out of unbelief?

(3)

Moving into the open as villages fly past:
mud and tethered cows and hills of stacked grain;
moving, flanked by the seasons--mustard flower and wheat,
or was it earlier--cornstalk and rain?
Moving out has a good bit of illusion:
you think you are drifting towards solitudes.
Things gather here too, toll barriers, octroi posts
and spice-reeking *dhabas* strung with pin-up nudes.

And my shadow is the same everywhere
and that itself can sometimes be a crowd.
Though of this I am often unaware.
There's your shadow too, owing no allegiance to the sun.
Then fading light, this black serpent that I ride,
isn't it another name for oblivion?

(4)

It is the past you fear, loved body, image
and loved voice resurrected are what you dread.
And you will think of what was said that day
or not, and hence will now remain unsaid.
If all you wish to curve past is memory, take stock.
The past is mottled all over on the skin.
How do you slough it off? There's nothing
it hasn't colonized outside you or within.

So you turn the ignition, hoping to jolt the car
into action. The doubt-motor sputters:
the near doesn't mirror as much as the far.
Are you dazed or is reality askew? You don't know;
and even as you press the accelerator,
suppose you find there is nowhere to go?

(5)

A wayside Fakeer attracts me, I stop the car.
He talks of impermanence (the East's strong suit),
notes that sadness sits on me like a scar.
I buy a glass of tea, I offer him some fruit.
If you meditate on transience, life seems too long.
His answer is brief, for terseness you can't match it:
Transience is a thought that comes to mind
and slips away before memory can catch it.

I try my hand at counselling myself
and explore the fog at the edge of things:
(tough at the best of times, these are the worst).
"Separation is a drifting into, not a guillotine."

A woman comes, head bowed, to the Fakeer.
She's pregnant, smiles and leaves a bowl of kheer.

(6)

When light refracts, which light-sliver to follow?
Confusions don't end here, they're also there within.
How do I transport this baggage, and where--
all that desire and lament bricked in?
Sheering off from nightmare, how does one steer
through a normal world? Insects and haze seem
to crowd the headlights. I don't know if I
am driving through twilight or a half-lit dream.

Distinctions fall like gnats, one may or may not know
light from Ahriman-dark, but illusions I define:
don't dream of elsewheres--there's no elsewhere to go.
A truck coming from the other side blinks
its one cyclopean eye. One moves into the future,
even as the future shrinks.

SHANTA ACHARYA

OF POEMS

Poems are no different than children--
at first clinging to your inner being and soul,
inhabiting your body's every nook and corner,
a permanent physical condition, oxygen in your blood;
defining your sanity, your unique personality,
or any life that you might claim to be your own.

Before you know they're born, they are rehearsing
eagerly to fly away, explore their place in the world.
Inexperienced and naïve, they are often easily led,
the weakest ones the most susceptible,
trusting strangers with a honeyed tongue,
ready to strike up a dialogue, pretending to be grown-up,
like a lot of adults they end up lonely or misunderstood.

If one achieves any sort of distinction, the others temporarily bask
in the refracted glory of success. If another is dishonoured,
most disappear into oblivion but the family stands solidly
behind, providing undying support and proof of pedigree.
Years later, having seen the world, survived its slings,
embraced its wicked ways, they return like the prodigal son.

With a shock of recognition you observe a child honing home
with the curve of your lip, the bend in your eyebrow;
and you remember fondly the time of its making,
when the word was made flesh, conceived and born.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Father's green fingers, keenest when gardening,
tendril-like hug the earth turning it within,
weed out the earth, watch seeds sprout.

Educating college kids, scribbling notes on a blackboard,
unraveling the geography of the universe
its glaciers, oceans, rock formations and atmosphere
made his hands move like a conductor's in a symphony.

Mother's hands do extraordinary things
as they dance to cook, clean, clutter, scold, caress;
they pray when writing letters, stories, poems, articles,
even bless when listing things to be done by us.
Mothers must have invisible hands,
they can do more than three things at once.

My older brother's expert fingers daily guide the scalpel,
swimming below skin and flesh, scanning for defects,
mending broken bones, aligining limbs back into place;
those surgical hands spend hours sewing new life.

My younger brother's fingers have not forgotten
how to spin cricket-balls with fiery passion,
wickets tumble down like flash storms of hailstones.
These days he builds oil refineries, state-of-the-art plants.

My youngest brother's poised hands photograph
the world in its intricate dance; a historian by instinct,
genres inherited from an archaeologist grandfather
who excavated temples with magnetic hands.

What inheritance is mine in this family of finger-prints,
candelabrum of gifts, handed through generations?
These hands pulsate with new insights;
knowing they could barely have done otherwise,
having been so programmed digitally through centuries.

SILENT WITNESS

"Dad!". . . her words roll out,
slow thunder following lightening,
the closing of doors, engines hissing,
movement of steel on steel, wheels on track, muffled
her litany of complaints in the Underground.

They pool their luggage on the platform,
he sits beside me on the empty wooden bench,
she hurries off to check the Tube map, confirm
which line would take them to Angel,
I overhear her ask a fellow traveler.

It was difficult to tell whether he was hurt,
used to this sort of thing, or was simply a pain in the butt.
He sat quietly dignified, not showing any emotion.
When the Bank train finally arrived,
we all got in together, he continued to sit next to me
and she continued to sit away from him,
perfect strangers. Other commuters who joined us
at Archway, Tufnell Park, Kentish Town, Camden Town
would never have guessed they were related,
thick as blood, father and daughter.

I wanted to tell as we hurtled along
how fickle death can be, particularly at his age,
lurking at every corner, how time is short
there isn't enough of it to squander on
misunderstandings and self-absorption;

How sometimes there is not a chance to whisper
farewell, fare forward father--
hold his hand, in silent witness and prayer,
touch his feet in reverence, kiss his forehead
or do anything at all; not out of choice
but as when one is drowning, powerless
against the swirling vortex of fate,
forcing you to face a lifetime without a father.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Until we met, I did not realise that I'd slept.
Life had passed me by, tip-toeing out of my chamber
like a guileless child retrieving its handful of toys
not wanting to disturb me in my panoramic slumber.

Then Fate cast us together and I was awakened
in this marvelous palace of illusion where we lingered
until you said: *All human relationships have a life-span*.

I can't help thinking of supermarket foods
with use-by dates embossed on each carton.
Love is done when love's begun, the sages caution.

Being weak, I keep straying into shops with 'Sale' signs on,
hunting for merchandise with lifetime guarantees.

I'm learning to meander through life's bazaar,
looking at shop-windows, admiring their displays,
without asking the price of life, love and liberty.

M. MOHANKUMAR

THE MOON HAS TWO FACES

1.

The moon has two faces.
The face we see has a sprawling scar.
We ignore it as a minor blemish
As we ignore a minor blot
On a shining name.

The other face is hidden from
Our view. It is reported to be
Smooth and unscarred, based on
Photographs brought by spacemen.
We go by such reports.

What if the moon had turned
Its other face to the earth?
Would it have looked more
Bewitching? The beams cooler,
More soothing to mind and body?
And the earth lovelier, bathed
In the unwonted glow?
Would the poets have waxed more
Poetical? Lovers gone into greater
Ecstasy? And the sea…
But no; let me not indulge in such
Vaporous thinking.

2.

Tonight the full moon shines
From a cloudless sky.
The stars are winking.
Before me, a shimmering landscape:

The greenish yellow fields stretching
Away; the gaunt palmyrah trees
Sticking out in the air; the shaded
The coconut clump; the vague contours
Of the hills merging into the night.
The moon--scar and all--
Has transformed it all.
The land lies quiescent, softened up,
All daytime ruggedness gone.
Gazing--at the moon, the stars
And the sky, in still silence,
In a communion of joy,
I stand here, a celebrant.
No hurry to get back to familiar
Things lit by electric bulbs.

THE MUSIC OF LIFE

The music of the spheres?
They say
Pythagoras heard it
And the likes of him.
Music
Inaudible to ears
Gross and unpurged.
As I listen,
I sometimes hear
Snatches of music
Scattered amidst
Life’s cacophony:
The music of life.
that’s enough for me.

POSEUR

On the face,
Innocuous smile.

On the forehead,
Sacred ash,
Sandal paste,
Vermillion dot.

On the tongue,
Sugary words.
Soft inflection.

In the heart
Shining razor.

THE CONCERT

The music has ended.
As the last notes dissolve in the air,
Silence fills the hall.
They are still engrossed, the *rasikas*,
Still listening, as if the gone-away
Notes are back again to haunt their ears.
As if the spell that music wove,
Binding singer, song and listener,
Binds them still--for one glorious moment.
Then, as the conscious self asserts itself,
Hands clap in deafening applause.
And as the parted curtain closes again,
They walk away silence, thinking
Of the heard melodies and those unheard,
Till the noises of the work-a-day world
Close in upon them.

AMRITAVALLI

RAIN

Rain falls quietly
on faces upturned
to swallow back tears

behind us, the evening rush hour

voices intoning, the organ
candles, the hymn, and so the bell
and then the

traffic pausing, halted
by the passing of so much grief
out of the churchyard into the other

where wait
the spade, the fresh soil
the home in the earth
for the boy on the bicycle the lorry
found in its path

a year ago now
we laid him there
as the birds returned home
a year ago now

Once more
rain falls.
My little girl
misses her raincoat.
Poor raincoat, I say
it served us well two years
it had many more years of wear
left in it, poor raincoat

Poor me, she says
It's I must stay
in the rain
without a raincoat now

BALLOON MAN

Things will break
Balloons will burst
and children cry

Simple balloons and apple balloons
owl balloons and monkey balloons
and balloon penguins

all in the hands of a balloon man

when she was seven, a child said
I still care for balloons

but at seven she does not cry
when a balloon bursts.

When she was six
months of age I remember
she broke her heart when her hand pulled off
the wide-eyed pink cheeked plastic head
of her best friend

things will break
balloons will burst
and children die

boys sent to school on bicycles
will be revealed to disbelieving mothers
as bodies on mortuary slabs

things will break
it's the tears must run out
and the caring change

give me time
let not my things break
while yet I care for them

CUTTINGS

If it has not long been severed
from its green parent
a bare stick in the earth
will become green again

and flowering spread lilac against a noon sky
otherwise too blue to look up at.

This *seema konna* here
is the cutting of a cutting
of a tree now cut down;

a clear memory of living elsewhere
coaxes roots into immigrant soil
well watered and nourishing, no doubt, yet

here these others remain
mere sticks for birds to carry away
and build nests with, for offspring.

A CROW-PHEASANT IN A COURTYARD

A night of rain.
The train stops.
A crow-pheasant in a courtyard
moves
from one badam-tree to another
to check out the view
from a different perspective,
perhaps.

The crow-pheasant moves
not seeing
the wings that move
it.

Then for an instant
My arms turn wings

I fly out to join the bird.

A slight jerk;
the train moves on.

A MOTHER ATTEMPTS POETRY

Sitting at the VDU
looking at my meagre effort
laid out in Word Perfect

they pucker their lips, my daughters
and round their eyes
at Omitted Capitals, missing punctuation and lines of uneven length

My poem at its first deconstruction
is an encounter of free verse with education
and in the hands of nimble minds it becomes
an exercise in touch typing and keyboard manipulation

Is there more? Can I type?
Where's the t? What's this key?
Got a new line! If she does
One, can I do Two?
Delete and Backspace, are they the same?
Held it down--it travels! oh its gone, the line
the lines! oh can we, oh may we, shall we
Rub It All Out?

Obliterate it all, my dears
let nothing remain
of the poems mothers make
with their daughters, for

good and bad faeries gaze
over our right and left shoulders, and
who knows when what might
enter their eye, which,
irritating it, must be washed out
by the tears from our own.

GAAYANA SAMAAJA KACHERI

A concert at the Gayana Samaja

They sat, neatly divided
as Nature intended
gentlemen on the right,
ladies on the left

to listen to Mali with Rukmini on the violin
or to MS with Vaidyanathan.

twenty, thirty, forty years ago

they entered as a family
bound together by season tickets

and when they bifurcated
one could still see

green and gold, mustard and violet
splashes of little girls' pavadais

on the white dhotied laps
of fathers, uncles and grandfathers.

Smiling now in my numbered seat
I push forward to tuck in my feet

let young ladies with two-wheeler keys
reach their spaces next to spouses

separately arrived, and think
how the music has changed.

S. MURALI

MY FATHER AND R.K.NARAYAN

1.
My father's neither the postmaster,
Nor the village schoolmaster,
But just an inspector of police.
He died a few days before R.K.Narayan did.
He just slept through his sleep
And left us mortals forever awake,
To the free fall of words
When the meaning is gently laid aside
When the ashes part in loud silence
And quiet.
Like R.K.Narayan.

2.
The monsoon dawns
Shuffles and shivers like black feathers
Against the gray hills. The sun
Hides his face for shame.
The voice of the cuckoo
Breaks over rain-wet plantain leaves.
Only the crows dare
To tell the truth:
Two men have departed:
N.Sivaramakrishnan,
R.K.Narayan--
Two more for Rudraloka
On boats made of sugarcane
Southward bound.

3.
No words can fill that absence
With meaning.
What words can refill the meaning
in absence?
With what can the drummer drum?

With what can the piper pipe?
Where's the space within?
Where's the honey?
Where's the fire?

Where is that Carpenter of Malgudi?

All sounds are dead.
My father's no more.
Does Malgudi have a Policeman?
One that fills days and nights
With songs and sounds,
Breaking the stillness and dream,
With laughter and tears?
With courage to dare
The unconcern of the gods?
Father, by far, was the richer of the two--
In experience. And Narayan, in words.

4.
Father never met Narayan
Nor did Narayan know him
In flesh or in fiction.
And yet in me they ford side by side
The river full of stars--sit
And chat in familiar ease
Of men, machines and metaphysics.

With the living
The immortals are chained.
Nor are they out of it.

The fiction of fiction
That constantly eludes
Detection or dominion.
When we are in it we think
Wonders never cease--all is eternal.

5.
Life's designs are too obscure from below.
Perhaps the manes can read
Upwards from the primal seeds of unrest,
Desire, tragedy, all that is this life.
Like the shattering of the first drop of rain
Over the stench of burning bodies
Side by side;
Like the fumes that rise up afterwards

After the mud pot is shattered.
And the space at last becomes one.
The fire, the deed.

A writer's nightmare
The manes' desire
The wonder
The design

6.
The moon rises slow
And heavy in the evening sky.
The rains are over.
Once more the fire, the air.
I tell the truth. I tell it right.
Remembering what is done.
Remembering.

AMBA UPANISHAD

Pity lies on the other side of it all.
My beauty cannot lie. I must die
And yet live beyond my life.

I had not known enough of hate
Before now, to hate so much
All that wrenched my very being away.

Why did the great prince carry me off
Before the watchful eyes of all
Only to leave me go back

Back to my prince? And yet
When he too disowned me, what
Love remained in me dissolved.

The residual hate turned me on my toes
From the sage to that half-brahmin
Taking up arms once again for me.

He too left me splayed like
A lifeless stem wavering
In the arduous breeze, raging wild

In destruction's path. Nothing can stop me now.
Let me reach the true, the vast, the beautiful
And what is all for my taking.

What matters now to my beauty
That tore the mind of that silly sage
Who would not even look at me?

The great Rama with the Axe, why
Did he swear to haste me to justice
All foreseen and foreknown?

Neither did the great Bheeshma
Look once towards me even as he turned
My life upside down. He is just.

As always. But the love that bore me back
Was just like everything else--insubstantial
It guided me to my destiny.

Pity lies on the other side of it all.
My beauty cannot lie. I must die
And yet live beyond my life.

My hate outlives Agni's soothing touch.
An inglorious will to prevail beyond
Death and live once again to kill.

From THE NOTEBOOKS OF A NATURALIST

Crow

The heat of the afternoon
hung like a burning arch
round the tiring city. The
temples and mosques sheltered
a few weary travelers.
The crow knew them
and had followed them
from beyond the city limits.
It circled thrice
Overhead and shouted:
God…God…God.

Then it began to rain.

Magpie Robin

In the backyard
the magpie robin sings lustily.
The tree swings heavy-laden
with the golden blooms
in the winnowing breeze.
The grass below
hugs the earth closer, the dew
fills the rose and that nameless
white flower. O, God of a Thousand names
my entire being thrills
at your touch.

The Golden Oriole

I had not known so much happiness
until that rainy afternoon
when the first oriole fluted
from across the mango trees.
A clear delightful call
filled with the brightness of sunshine
slowly fading in the afternoon light.
No night and day after that
Could take away
The golden oriole's fruity call.
It hung like a rhyme over the mango trees.
And it still does. The rains have come and gone.
I cannot say the same thing about happiness.

Chameleon

This is the life of earth, changing
Fast changing to survive.
A politics of sheer success.

Chameleon--he gets blamed
for the changing earth.

Myna

The evening hangs on the myna's wings
closing and unclosing, reluctant, over the hills.
The fields lie empty, the children have left
All games over. But the myna remains
Close on the night's heels.

Stone Curlew
(for K.K.N.--naturalist and professor)

Once again we froze against the stony shore,
as the curlew turned, with a graceful sweep--
wings light, open, alert, eyes wide, beauty bright.
We knew it knew and yet was game to play
all over again the very same game
of hide and seek in the softening light.
One foot bent and the forward thrust
of the westerly breeze did the rest--
the bird rose and soft-landed, leading our eyes
away from her speckled brood. The stream
passed silent. The wind kept pace, and
no stone moved while the curlew called.
A shrill whistle, plaintive, lone, while
her mate somewhere heard and turned.
The sky lay vast, unquiet in its intense spread.
The bird rose and called again. A feather
floated down. We stood silent,
amazed at both bird and sky.

The Bat Who Strayed into the Light

This bat was a loner,
for he had shed his masks.
No longer a vampire
he strayed into the light
of an open window
and found two humans
lying nude
unable to make love in the light
of neon lamps. He whispered
to the woman: there's
dark beyond this wall
come and see the dark

in the light.
The woman followed him.
There was a thunder clap
in the otherwise silent room.
The bat knew he had hit the light.
The room went dark.
And there was enough light to see by.

Ratsnake

The afternoon lay half-awake over the damp leaves;
only a few dried ones rustled as the ratsnake moved
slipping on their wet inner edge, its long yellow body
sliding thin, weaving rain-patterns on the brown earth.
The magpie robins saw it first as its flicking head
disappeared under the sheaf of palm fronds.
Only the whisking tail told another tale of the routed nest
And the dismembered chicks; a few ruffled feathers
Still hung in the thinning breeze. The ratsnake
Turned; the silent hush of the bird-couple marked off
A reluctant pause in the natural drama,
When the rain broke again with the austerity of a recluse.

S. A. PRABHAKAR

THE DOOR UNOPENED

Only the wind, I thought it was,
A gentle rattle at the door, then, a pause.
One couldn't tell from here
The windows were fast, for fear
Of the eerie, the quiet and the dark --
Even the dogs they didn't bark
Jaws shut, just watched in awe?
Eyes fix'd, tails taut, perhaps saw
Whatever it was that stood,
Wanting to come in, if it could.
Only the wind, or was it
Something else from the flaming pit,
Scorched, tormented, wanting to tell
Its tale of tears, where it fell,
Of dreams unborn, love unspoken,
Fields left fallow, parents broken,
I'd never know, for the door I didn't open.

REMEMBRANCE

The mind harks back to its dawn
When sleep like a bashful bride
Flees, under a stranger's roof--
Multi-hued bubbles die
Even as they are born
Only the shades linger.
The patter of rain sends feet
Scurrying to the window
To watch wraith-like trees
Dancing in the mist.
How the river claws at the banks!
Fearful of the sea, hungry for land,
Yet rushing along to meet its fate!

Fires one thought had been doused
Flare up, rage and singe
Old wounds open up, bleed
One still hears the mob, at the door
Baying for blood, furious to stop
Miscegenation, of the brown and the brown.
I reach for my mate, now long cremated--
The mind shudders, scampers back
All one wants to forget
Are all one remembers.

COOUM

Near the cinema, stripping
Women of their souls,
The river quietly breathes
Stoic like a saint, though
Dying of the city's sins...

On the bridge, the harlot
Too weary to walk the streets,
Stands, staring into the waters,
Mourning the river she had lost
In her hamlet, green
Where it skipped
Like a girl
Without a care
Foaming, frothing, giggling
As innocent as innocence can be...

Unlike the river, here
Dying of the city's sins...
The harlot, she weeps.

WALL

Around him all the time
Words dancing like sirens
Wanting to break his silence
Words from the eyes
From the lips
The heart
Hurt, hurting, smart smarting,
Doubting, doting, angry, angered,
Baleful, maddening, murderous,
Words like a mob of horns
Wanting to move in a snarl
Pummelling the stricken
The stranded and the dumb
Around him all the time
Faces changing faces
Shedding faces
Seeking faces
The right faces
With the wrong words
Faces, words
Around him all the time
Dancing like sirens
Wanting to break the silence
Of one who knows
But will not speak.

TEMPLE ENTRY

Inside the unholy temple
Whence unseen gods had long fled
Leaving behind images dead,
The chosen or the damned
Kept up their chant
Less in faith than in fear
As the drums of the slaves sounded near--
No aliens were these
Coming to gloat and seize,
Only the sun-dyed natives
Condemned to abuse, condemned to please--
No iconoclasts were they
Coming to break and slay,
Only the forbidden, long kept away
Wanting to come in, wanting to pray--
Can temples stand, that divide the land?
Must men die that priests may live?

RITA MALHOTRA

EARTHQUAKE IMAGES
Gujarat. 26th January 2001

the earth quakes in fury
puts life to a dreadful sleep
and shakes the dead awake….

in tearful madness, she digs into
the ruins of a home that was
to flush out memories, if not lives
for all can't be dead
while memories are alive.

temple bells
a chaos of clangs
the girl child praying
with folded hands
is devoured alive
to the will of gods

tiny heads held high in pride
marching in rhythm
to the republic band
knew not that they advanced
to feed the cunning
graveyard's greed.

SILENCE

Dahlias in purple bloom
preen themselves
in the mirror of my eyes
beaming carnations
a riot of magic hues
roses blush wild
the sea of red reflects
beatific perfection
rich green blades of grass
in gentle sway
gold-winged butterflies
ride the winds
pirouetting peacocks beckon
the first rain drops
eyes feast on nature's treasure
fragrant sighs fill the air
as folded hands gently urge
"solitude" forsake me not.

DEATH

Mother's haunting absence
is omnipresent
from the lone rose-stick
in the porcelain vase
to the everyday kitchen sounds,
the miniature temple
in the forlorn corner
the faded orange-blossom
embroidery
on the pastel bedspread
she's present everywhere
but she is most present
in father's absent gaze….

HOSHANG MERCHANT

READING ARABIC POETRY THE DAY IRAQ FELL

For I am a stranger
Beloved Iraq
Far distant, and I here in my longing
For it, for her…. I cry out: Iraq
And for all the orange groves
And all the olive groves
And the beds of rice topped with chicken
And beds of pearls in the seabelly
And in the oyster belly the pearl
But in the belly of the earth: oil

A new Mongol has come
And we have to stoke our tandoors
with our children's bones
And we have blood on our plates
Blood in our beds
But, our invaders have our blood on their hands

For I am a stranger, Iraq
I'm not of your blood
And the lady of Hyderabad
In her starched white cotton saree
Adorned with kalamkari
Speaking pure Dakhni
Guarding her precious Arabic books from theft
Under the shadow of the mosque dome copied from Tunis
said:
This is the pearl that came to us from Tunis
But it was just an old mosque now
I read all the poets of Baghdad
And even the passport thieves fell silent
Because poetry is a passport in itself

And it is also a transport
I wept pure tears

Crystalline like pearls
Which cleansed all infections
Then why does the Mongol only understand blood
Oil and blood
Blood and oil
The seabeds of Bahrain are polluted by oil
There are no pearls of the purest water now
The purest water now is tears
The eyes of desert martyrs do not turn pearls
They remain hollow
Mosque minarets now are factory-chimneys
And I smell burning human flesh
Adonis Adonis will not rise from the Euphrates
this spring
Water is pure cyanide
And people prefer to drink salt water
Refine it and drink it
Like their own tears
Men have died before machines
raining death from the air
For a lost notion of knighthood
It is indeed now night We're all benighted
When will they crucify the returning Christ, Iraq!
When will they bathe in the blood of the new Buraq?

AN INDIAN POEM FOR BAGHDAD

And now her trees are slowly drinking water
after the summer drought
And her two eyes shine like two moons on the water
The waters of my native city that stretch to Arabia
And beyond: And there in the desert Baghdad awaits rain

The rain of mercy over Baghdad, God's gift
Or has God abandoned Baghdad?

I can hear the trees slowly drinking water in her gardens
Her two eyes shine like moons over the waters
But my lover, 27 years old, lies under the mountain
In his grave, eating mud and drinking rain

I want to sleep under the earth with my lover
I'd very much like to sleep under the earth
And be with you Baghdad in an unnamed grave
Because when you pray for one dead loved one
you pray for all the dead

Terry Taimur Murtuza Mirza, the guitar player of Hyderabad
A Picasso among cooks and decorators
Says it's always good to think of death
It is a sign of the rain of God's mercy
Because the people of this earth have forgotten mercy:

Ali Abbas, 12 years old, was protected by a mother's embrace
When it rained bombs instead of mercy from the skies
A mother between the sky and death protecting a 12-year old
She died for him but he lost both his arms
The arms that hugged a mother

What rain will wash this blood?
How many monsoons will it take?
The house and the garden are gone
After all we are all tenants on this earth
As we water the earth with our tears and blood
And the dying father left his palm-prints on the wall

The wall is all that remains
And the palmprints
But his entire family is gone
And the next rain will wash away his last signs too
His last signs imprinted upon our hearts
And the heirs of Haroun al-Raschid beg in the streets of Baghdad

Our hearts are gardens we grow
For another's use
And now the garden is weed-choked
And no rains come
For in ancient India and Sumeria God too was dry clay

Made into a statue
Invested with godhead
Raining mercy for centuries
But the marauding mobs in their dry land
Have turned these gods to clay again
And no rains come…

Who has the key?
The thief has the key to the museum-god
Sold in 12 pieces in the modern market
We know the price of oil
but not the value of history

At the morgue lies the bride
Killed by a jealous husband
For war starts not in the skies
But like rain in the marriage-bed
And a husband lies in the same graveyard erect
First burnt by fire, then strangled by jealousy's torment

Whose earth is it anyway?
The earth is his who can make it rain
The tears of mercy from two eyes
That shine like my mother's in my nursery
Through her hopes and fears:

And now the rain comes
I can hear it rain in Bombay
Nourishing the roots in my mother's garden
And now her palms
wear new crowns of leaves…

POEM FOR MY SISTER: THE GARDEN-TOMB

It is the season of gently falling rain
Autumn in other countries, here eternal summer
At the end of a long avenue of trees I have come
to look behind me and see you standing at its head
(You were always ahead of me)
And now I've stayed behind
to see you go ahead of me again
It is I who should have died
Turned that zig-zag road
to the house on the hill
of our father the owner and tenant
of our hearts
god-like, now gone
And memory settles soft as a feather
of time on my hands
when adolescence leaps out from behind
a tree / Laughs a girl's laugh
And is gone
Stay with me
Our bodies are gardens we grew
For others' use
And I do not wish to tend a grave
the rest of my days
But we are born in two times:
Our own and Eternity
And it is there the cloth is woven
for a cradle and a shroud
Here, the leaves fall
and grow into a Book
It is here we call on our ancestral home
and lay claim to the little earth
which is our own / To find it the house of the Friend

I have seen the graves of poets
in Shiraz and at home
And the script on the page
is the same script on their tombs
Birds flutter out of dovecotes at dawn
At night they turn home
But here everything is in time and out of time
Enrich me with the harvest of our day
I hear a call, 'Come'
I look for my shoes, but you go, born ahead of your time
Leaving me here, the one born after my time
See, the tree you planted sprouts green leaves
Seeing you beneath it I weep
And to see me weep you smile.

K. SRILATA

GROWING UP

What is that spot on your skirt? she asks
peering down from her huge height
nose twitching with curiosity
a sly smile darkening her lips
holding her breath as
the girl answers too casually:
Nothing. Just mud. I will ask mama to wash it off.

The child woman runs home to learn the wisdom
of not playing
of wearing dark coloured clothes (on somedays)
of being "watchful" always
even when you are only twelve.

NOW

Now that we have tunneled our way
to a house by the sea
done up with personal histories
suppressed for years,
Now that we can, if you like,
gaze at the open seas
breathe in all the beauty
unthreatened by the city which says
its prayers over loud speakers
away from the barking of mangled three-legged dogs,
Now that we have, as they love to proclaim, settled,
I find the sea staring at me
like an immense
mirror.

THE ULTRASOUND

There is a single, live normal
foetus in utero
in cephalic presentation.

The day the ultrasound delivered
to the three of us
a vast sea
with a mythic being
bobbing amidst sonic waves
like a distant swimmer,
the radiologist asked in an illegal whisper,
“Do you want to know the sex of your baby?”
and before I could recover from the shock
she had conspired to tell my husband,
“It is a boy”.

That cluster of cells
had betrayed their secret
and for the first time in six months
I cried.

DARIUS COOPER

ANCHORING A DAILY-TRAVELLED RAILWAY-CITY-LINE IN BOMBAY

CHURCHGATE

Once, Queen's Road stretched out
like the fat monarch's extended finger,
all the way to the sacred Parsee fire
kept burning inside Colaba's agyari.

The chanting of early morning hymns.
quieten the midnight cries of the Parsee lunatics
from the nearby charitable asylum.

But the quieter inmates
only wait for the night,
when the beams of the lighthouse
bounce, all over the roof
of Kharsethjee Furdoonjee Parekh's bungalow

and land playfully, playfully,
on Merwanjee Taabck's.
Then, as the sea, prompted
by the dark monsoon night, rolls,
and the beams come back
to join the water's
reaching of the cotton godowns,

"Go down!" "Go down!"
those quieter ones murmur,
as the light sweeps over
Sir Dinshaw's Petit's Temperance Hall.

When morning finally arrives,
and the local trains begin
their delivery, of early morning milk,
and the city's first English-edition newspaper,

for the rich Sahib's malees
who come to fetch them, arrogantly,
from the trembling station-master,

all the Parsee lunatics,
standing in a single line
before St. Thomas's church,
make a sign of the cross,

before miming, I assembled earnest,
the eating of invisible pomphrets,
hundreds and hundreds of them
brought in by the Kohlis,
exhausted from their all
night fishing-vigil.

MARINE LINES

The disbanded English Marine battalions
vacated, almost a century ago.
But the remnants
of their muscular culture
is still put through the paces,
in all the cosmopolitan gymkhanas, here.

While painted villains
from the first and third worlds,
daily die, in the air-conditioned
Metro and Liberty theatres,
Karve Road churns its daily dose
of crematorium fires:

it's ghee and sandalwood
ending the gathi
of one more castemarked marine,
whose line has finally
come to an end.

CHARNI ROAD

While different colored fish swim
in the controlled waters
of Taraporwalla Aquarium;

While main and bit actors begin
preparing clever lines and pregnant silences
at the Sahitya Sangh theatre;

While Wilson College's anglophiles grimace,
tasting the stones
of the invader's alphabet,
in their empire-coned
Chowpatti bhel-puri;

at midnight, it is rumored,
Lokmanya Tilak rises
from his samadhi,
and strolls Chowpatty Beach

mortally confused:
(*for that was not his birthright*)
by the soulful arias,
rising from the ruins
of the Royal Opera-House,

and the vanyaas, the money-lenders of Khotachi Wadi,
counting their day's clever earnings
in a peculiar sing-song, late
late, into yet another
independent night.

GRANT ROAD

At one corner, the curtain lifted,
and Shakespeare's and Sikander's
soliloquies were recited…
all along Lamington Road.

But, at another corner, the curtain descends:
playhouse becomes whorehouse,
the stage becomes a cage,
and the agarbatti's incense
and the dholak's solos,
cannot extinguish
the theatrical screams
of so many abducted virgins,
fetching the highest price, here.

Once, this road, granted a heaven
for all those Parsees,
when they rubbed shoulders
with the race that wore the Sola Topi.

But soon, this road, became a hell
for all those who couldn't climb
to their cousins' Cumballa and Malabar dreams
of villas, airlines, iron and steel.

Quietly resigning their spirits
behind softly murmured *tatas*,
Their famous Parsee Waag
is now handcuffed
to the fearful symmetry
of an enclosed baag,
tolerating very little
disobedience, or dissent.

BOMBAY CENTRAL

This Maharata's Mandir
now has a terminus,
and all those poor labourers
who worked, dinraat,
to carve out Bellasis Road,
having finally fled the Surat famine,

will be proud, so proud,
to watch their fattened state
pouring out, from all
these countless trains, and
all these counted platforms,
onto this tar-plus, this *tar*
plus at the center.

MAHALAKSHMI

Blessed by
a Hindu Goddess's temple
and a fourteenth century
Muslim saint's durga,
it is also cursed
by the circulation of miscalculations,
as horses regularly
pound the turf.

But who can forget
that *maha* hysteria:
when Dara Singh
and brother Randhawa
suddenly broke loose
from all the difficult holds
imposed on them,
by all of the world's
famous freestyle wrestlers,
without Mahalakshmi's
or Haji Ali's aid.

LOWER PAREL

Set in the smoke and hum of mill-machinery:
this is where the English-exiled Marx
was first re-incarnated,
along with tuber-cu-losis,
both forged as metaphors
in Indian film and Indian literature.

But this is also where
an arrogant Albert and a fat Victoria
created a museum,
to display to the rest of the world:
the text and tile
of their Indian empire.

ELPHINSTONE ROAD

Offering a chain of hospitals
after removing the city's ramparts
and making the fort, finally redundant,
Lord Elphinstone brought much relief
to the city's inhabitants and animals.

Still the textile heart of the city:
what lowerparel maims and kills,
elphinstoneroad tries to save and heal.

DADAR

Immoveable bridge
and moveable staircase…
during the Indian Freedom Movement,

today, it only brings forth
whitewashed warriors
battling former colonialists,
on cricket pitches
all over the world.

MATUNGA ROAD

After the King's abduction…
only the king's circle remains.
The British muskets.
that once pointed to the heavens
before creating horizontal martyrs,
are now encircled
by the tusk
of a Dravidian *matang*,
or elephant.

The congregation
of dark-skinned merchants,
only dream of ivory, here.

MAHIM

Thirsting for a water
not bearing the salt
of the Arabian Sea,
St. Anthony, finally, quenched
his thirst,
with sweet sweet water
from the city's first coconut tree,

giving to its grateful residents,
seeking miracles on
impossible terms, here,
the celebrated, Wednesday Novena.

BANDRA

The old Hindi-film movie-stars,
shunned behind the moss
of their shrinking mansions,
rarely venture into the sun.

The younger, more robust
joggers, laugh at them

and their own parents,
steadfastly lifting
their family's heavy crosses,
all the way to the painted Mary
on the Mount.

Roads, no longer,
do their linking here.

KHAR

Once, the salt of the city,
someone has stolen its mighty *danda*.
No one remembers the Mahatma,
or the March.

Only *revenge* simmers,
as the prices go up again,
and salt is poured
on re-opened wounds,
again and again and again.

SANTA CRUZ

The Holy Cross of the Salsette Indians
crucifies, once again,
the weary non-resident
Indian traveler of the skies,
coming for a visit
to an imaginary city,

whose customs officer
sprouts no leaves,
as his deadly Marathi *Khul*,
mortals each and every item in is bag, and
martyrs each and every dream,
in his skull.

VILE PARLE

Granted in *inaam* to Navroji Jamshedji,
it stood spread its wings
for the city's first flying-club amateurs,
and Francis Xavier's jesuitical monks.

Today, only Iskon's fake Krishna
and T.V.'s manufactured corodpatti
get their daily darshan, here.

ANDHERI

Coming to terms with its native *vertigo*
is an ironwelded housing-complex,
where the rich and the famous

play dangerous games,
with their daily and consummate
areas of *darkness*.

JOGESHWARI

It wasn't only the Brahmanic caves of Amboli
that crumpled over time, here,
since they were cut into
fragile volcanic breccia rock.

The volcano that took
so many Muslim lives, here,
made stones, all over India, weep.

So they hastily created Fantasy Land:
where a circulated history
could become,
more and more distant

from the top of a ferris-wheel,
as looking down
always encourages,
the acceptance and embrace
of fiction.

GOREGAON

Like Venice, Goregaon floats,
not on water, but on milk.
While its Aarey arteries
circulate and feed the city,

Powai and Tulsi's calm lake waters
feed dreams, but only
of the academic kind,
as the I.I.T. recruit,
clutching his visa,
sees in all these palm trees

southern California's alluring hues.
And the famous Studio of nine colors
adds a tenth one to his dream:
The raider's ark:

an important part
of his on-coming Hollywoodian
non-resident residue.

BOMBAY ANTHEM

City of
the Indian tri-color,
Union Jack, and
Star and Stripes:
it's time to sing
your anthem again.

There was a Flora in your fountain.
There was a Crawford in your market.
But in the fountain, now, there is a drought.
And in the market, a slaughterhouse.

If at one Brabourne,
brown men, all dressed in white,
mastered the colonial game
of efficient pace and wily spin;
At another Brabourne,
a cheerful Iranian,
washes a cocoa-cola girl,
on a resplendent length
of American tin.

There was Gable and Vivian
at Dhobi Talao's Metro.
There was Bogey and Bergman
at Churchgate's Eros.
Once, Hollywood's stars
shone brightly,
in the city's firmament and tenements,
till Holy's wood got hacked to pieces
by a suddenly unsheathed nativist sword.

What was King Arthur's Excalibur
doing at the Regal,
when Alec Guinesses's Colonel Bogey
expired at the Excelsior?
Why was Strand, our Bali-Hi,
so shamelessly stripped
before a nude New Empire,
paramounting, crude, nativist,
Dravidian porn?

What is new in this city?
Nothing, really…
Another marble tile
fell from the sides
of the National Television Centre…
Another Maharashtrian bai
was prevented by
a compassionate road-side nai
from polluting the waters
of the Parsee Bikha-Behram well,
with her own, loudly
cursed at, menses.

What is new in this city?
Nothing, really.
They have torn
so many buildings down.
And those that remain
have gone to sleep and seed.
So don't search for nourishment
of any kind
in what were once so
proudly called, roots.

No art can be seen by the artless.
The past is a blindfold now
bandaging the present.
Somewhere and everywhere
only plastic and glass atone,
as they slowly overwhelm
mud and stone.

As the Jumbo-Jack replaces the Union-Jack.
As the Indian tri-color begins to fade.
We run, we run, to place our children
in the parade, starting
at The Golden Arches;

helping them so easily, so
easily, to emasculate our history
in an imaginary city,
unable, even in its final breaths,
to very simply and movingly
mourn for us.

ANANYA SANKAR GUHA

A SECRET

That was a secret
only you knew it didn't you
as it stung like the bee,
or the wasp?
Yet you let it grow
nettled in a spurious dream
wove it into my hideousness
and I emerged like the
clowning, impassioned man
(the lover some call this)
The secret my friend is
that even as I whispered
love it smothered all wishes
The secret is knowing it
how to keep it unsullied
like the monotone of cawing crows

Yes, that was a secret
entombed in unmasked wishes

JANUARY, 2002

The words that I speak
The words that I write
are polarities; which one
is poetry?
There is the clamour to seek,
importunate desires to be satiated
Lord, what ails the heart?
the winter's sun is graying
old men look at indolent desires
the young, angry gather stones

With every cawing of the crow
there is a stealthy design
as man looks for more

ANJU MAKHIJA

TEETHING TROUBLES

Vicco's fozzilized blob refuses to budge,
the tube hardens, callous-like,
dried paste where once oozed
a texture, smooth and creamy
in the land of Krishna's glory.

New, improved Close-up is another story.
Flexible pack, ultra slick,
the fusion refoams to Murdoch, Gates,
covers jagged bristles in a haste.

Squeezed in the middle,
the stripes plump afront.
Three colours, our national flag:

Green, fresh as our gardens,
white, clean as our roads,
orange, chaste as our saffron robes.

PICTURE-PERFECT KHOKLA…

Where local artisans
create wisdom from clay,
sink deities into the riverbed,

Where sugarcane juice bubbles up froth,
and men on *Khatiyas,* clap
to a steady beat, salute

saffron flags, while cool
under the umbrella the statue stands
overseeing dry grass, polythene bags,

A bird dives, plunges
into the stone's eyes.
Red tongues roar, tails wag,
Mikes blast, *maha-aarties*, gags.

Idols don't bleed or perspire,
nor speak words men can hear.
Swords prop up the umbrella,
ideals of the mankind.

MOLTING

The scales, dark, ribbed,
perfectly formed;
it had long been gone
through a hole in the cupboard
gnawed by a famished mouse;
even as the spider entrapped UFOs,
and fireflies shed light
on a dull day when the rain falls
as if it may sift the earth once and for all;
as if no layers exist below,
and a python may never lay a hundred eggs.

The Cielo, smooth, slithery,
speeds across flyovers
breaks through cement, crunches bones,
hutments collapse, entrails turn inside out;
even as television screens look on,
and tubelights illuminate
on a bright day when the sun shines
as if it may emblazon all things divine;
as if sadhus never levitate,
and *shamans* never bait vipers, kraits.

Eyes cloud, clear; headlights blur
Venom spurts, blinds, swallows its own kind.

GOPI KRISHNAN KOTTOOR

ELDERLY COUPLE WAITING

New York Penn. Union Station.

They do not kiss or caress
As the young ones who sat on these very seats
A few minutes gone. He lets fall the bag
Tenderly over her time bent shoulders
That brighten a little with rushing blood
Like the last color
Over fading periwinkles.

In the quiet sea of their touch,
As between broken alphabets
Embedded in misty graves,
A dark ship sails

Around an island of togetherness.
And holding onto hands beyond the origami of flesh,
They sight blood-wharfed harbours the young ones
Left in the name of true love,
And its bruises of stars
Lit with the small mercies of dying nights.

THE WIDOW

Another woman has become a widow.
Another woman who thought she would die
In her husband's arms
Now wears white
As she returns to the darkness of a silent room
Beside its mattress rolled up on the empty bed.

Past the wharfs of laughter, the seeds of touch
Sprouting in the arms of love,

The lamp she shuts tonight
Glows, so intense it lights up her eyes.

SUCH SADNESS IS A FLOWING RAIN

What if I had kissed you then--
I would have felt that consolation
That must now never be.
That look in your eyes
Anchored where night boats cannot leave
The earth's still moorings. So I now know
Such sadness is a falling rain.
Such sadness that has no where to go
Cannot be let in through our open doors

And so, ploughs deep,
Then curls within
Loosening ancient cemetery stones.

HAPPINESS

You have turned past
The long corridors of our pain.
Not even a twitch. But when pain came,
Your face that was clear water
Turned the color of darkness and mud.
Pain came so often
As though you were a house
It could live in, uncaught,
Just so that it is happiness
To watch you so still
With almost a smile in the ice-box
And the sun's dazzle
Threading mist among the winter boughs
Of your freshly washed bones.

DARSHAN SINGH MAINI

THE SIGNATURES OF GOD

Mysterious are the ways of God,
And none may know why
He has put you on the cross,
For such things are beyond the ken of man.
Take comfort in this, my soul,
What happens is to happen,
And it bears the signatures of God.
That's how the yoke of suffering
Becomes a garland of truth,
And the pain is tempered with milk
To sweeten the defeated heart.
Sit down, then, to break bread
With your kind, and let
The world-pain become yours
To lighten the burden of blows
Fallen, unawares, unsought.

DISENCHANTMENT

When it began to snow in summer,
When the nightingales lost their song,
When the leaves turned yellow
And the greening was gone so soon,
I knew I had fooled myself
For years in pursuit of a siren dream,
And travestied my true self
So ruinously I could weep
For foes who had mocked me once
To queer the pitch of my embattled being.

Love's not earned on salt knees
It comes when it comes,
Soft like a rain of roses,
Dropping at your feet unseen.

A REQUEST, A PRAYER

It's for you, O Lord, to erase
The old text and wash away
The dirt of the days riding
Like a sly thief
In the attics of my mind,
And soiling the copy of belief.

Let these ambivalent intimations
Take a form, a stance, a style,
So I may raise the pen high
To hoist the *Nishaan* of trust,
And shake it in the blue skies
Where ends the story of our dust.

I wait now for the April breeze
When the greening of my soul starts,
A time when the water turns red
In the vats of our hearts,
And blushes like a bride,
Amazed, waiting in alien parts.

DEEPA AGARWAL

MY HEART A WRITHING FISH

My heart, a writhing fish,
On the sands of your silence,
Waits
For the firm hand
That will push it back
Into the waters that lap
Softly
Against your barren shores
Touching, they cannot irrigate
That dryness
Like a sieve
Your sands cannot contain
The water of love.

The tides come and go
Spend themselves on the shore
Leave their flotsam and jetsam
Like this poor fish
My heart
For how can the water-dweller know
That it cannot survive
In that arid clime
Where there is no movement?
Only a parched stasis
Bogs souls
In the morass of time
Not the free movement of the waves
That can carry you
As far as time travels…

THE GHOST WIFE

As I move
Silent, invisible
Through
The cluttered landscape
Of your existence
My unheard voice
Calls out
In a timbre
Pitched too high
For your mortal ears…

My formless arms
Fail to hold you
As you slip through
Their eager, frantic embrace
Too ethereal
To contain
Your stolid frame

But…
The wistful scent
The sad magic
Of my unfulfilled desire
Will ever remain

To haunt your dreams
Tangle you
In a web
Too strong
For you to ever unravel.

Deepa Agarwal

I WILL BE MYSELF

When you played,
Swam
Splashed
In the water of my womb
Safe
From want and desire
Longing and need
Anger and lust
Did you not wonder
As you fought your way out
How you would survive
A water being
On arid earth?
Or did you bear
Your own fulfillment
Clenched in your tiny fists
As you announced
Through that first insistent yell
I am here, I am I?
Call me what you will
I have already chosen the shape of my nose
The sound of my voice
And I will live
I will be I
In spite of you
In spite of yours
Mother father
Brother sister
I will grow and be myself
Despite all odds!

OVER THE EDGE OF THE EARTH

You and I
Slipped
Together
Over the edge of the earth
And chose to drop
Free falling
Falling free
Holding captive the stars
Dancing in our eyes
The firmament our domain
Our bodies growing
Endlessly
Till space
Could not contain us

But…
Touching earth
We shrank once more
Into our mortal mould
Turned small and limited
Once again.

JAMES B. SWAIN

MADONNA OF THE MANGO GROVE

Most of the mango groves I've seen
were not made for walking in.
They're tan with dust, not grassy green

or even a salt-white chitty ground,
but shady, still; inviting those
with small children to come around,

say in the heat of May or June
when the moon is full and the trees breathe
their free rustling naked tune…

This picture has a living twin,
not identical, I'm sure;
for I feel a prickling of the skin

as memories of my mother close
with memories of a telescope
my father bought and often posed

up in the Million Dollar Field; a weave
of summer moon and summer star,
an orchard you would not believe.

FIRE GIRL

The little girl
between the tracks
picked up the coals
the engines left
inspecting each one
as a gift.

She picked up this
and pondered that
She shook her bucket
down and sat
as others sit
to mark a slate
or dig a worm
to use for bait

I'd like to be there
when evening comes
and she goes home…
the dolak drum
would welcome her
and drive the dark
clear out of the ancient
engine park
where they are camped

Just look at her look
at this and that,
She's foxed Behemoth…
Dog and rat
say she's a creature
of the sun
who snatches coals
still warm and fresh
from sacred ash
with bare hands
and dusty flesh.

BIBHAS DE

THE COWDUST HOUR

Somewhat suddenly then
By the rustic landing at water's edge
In the aged banyan tree's dusk
In the trunk root forest
Time calls a halt
And lets the sky carry on
With a light thickening
To a faint burst of light.
Onshore and where on ricefields
The last gold trims
A homeward skybird's lone wing,
One, two, one, two, then a lull--
A few, then a lull--
Cowbells peal.
The dust blown at the hoof
Over the note of the wedding flute
Signals a dying phase of light,
The bride-viewing light,
As he lifts the veil and sees
In the mirror of the eyes
Deep, stilled time.
Just as suddenly then
The sky bows out
And lets time carry on
In the aged banyan tree's dark
In the trunk root forest.

NISHAPUR

Evening and multicolored lamps
Down the cobblestone street
Of a city that never really was,
Not in the sea view of Byzantium,
Not in the pleasure palaces of Elysium;
More at a silk road tavern town,
A lone hamlet one nears alone,
An approach down a hill slope may be,
Dusty, sweaty on a camelback may be,
Tired, longing for a warm meal, a bed,
As the Bedouin—pleasurably--thinks:
This is a place I've seen before,
Or wanted long to know
From those disconcerting dreams
Of the sultry oasis nights,
The place that will replay for me
Many happinesses, formless and animate,
That I sensed were, but never knew
And so noted away somewhere.
Now the shops raise the nightly awnings;
Syrupy tea, oil cakes and water pipes
With long hose for passing round,
Street-side benches companionable,
Verses shared from Omar's lore,
The camels restful at the hitching posts
On this road of crossed destinies
That ramps up towards the end
To a place known from the muted bustle,
Smell of lamb and pepper on open flame,
The high welcoming lantern at the portal,
The place all our nights come from,
That long imagined caravanserai.

SUKRITA

GENERATION GAP

(1)

I cannot fathom
This ocean between us
The ocean filling up with
Alligators, big fish, sharks and all,
Corals and weeds
Going in circles
With elephantine waves
Gushing over them
Round and round
over and over.

(2)

Fiery sunflowers
Holy marigolds
Roses smitten with love
You, the droplets
Of dew
In the garden of
My mind

So many selves
Yours and mine
Dancing in the myriad
Mirrors, each morning.

PAUL LOVE

WISH YOU A HAPPY JOURNEY

In India
You drive by grace
And not by law.

That insolent cycle rider
No-handing his way
In front of you,
Arms folded serenely across his chest,
Abruptly seizes handle bars,
Right-angles into your path--
You zig, he zags--
And all's forgiven.

That timorous woman
Dithering by the roadside
Waiting to cross--
"Should I, shouldn't I,
Now, not now"--
Tucks down her head
Closes her eyes, counts ten
And, when your car has reached the very spot,
Runs blind across the road in front of you.
Well, what are brakes for?

That thieving lorry driver
Roaring toward you
Down the highway
Lights glaring, horn blaring
He's in your lane!
You hit the shoulder (is there one?)
He passes, smirking--his latest victory!

In India
You drive by grace
And not by law.

IFTEKHAR NASEEM

Iftekhar Naseem is an expatriate Indian writer, whose publications include a volume of poetry, *Narman*, as well as essays on gay poetry in India and in the United States.

AN ANSWER TO THE FEMALE LIBERATIONISTS
(for Kishwar Nahid)

Where were you?
--You who screamed for women's rights
Why were you silent
when I washed dishes:
the eunuch going house to house?
You should have understood
Why did you not speak?

I kept travelling
city to city/alley to alley
dancing and singing:
amusement of the crowds
a man in a saree. . .
Where were you?
Why were you silent?
You should have understood
Why did you not speak?

And the man who tormented you
was the man who tormented me
I took on your disguises
Your ruses and your vices
You should have understood
But you kept silent

I kept washing dishes house to house.

HER/MAN

I am a two-in-one
I use back and front
I change sides
I do not hide
An in and out
Or up and down
Above/below: all reversible for me

Only a man can complete a man
Only a woman can complete a woman

I am Man/Woman
I am complete within myself
O divided ones
Do not try to tear me apart

Heal thyself!

‘NATH’ OF THE GAY PROPHET

I will press your legs
tired after hunting the beloved
I will kiss your feet
even when you reject my kind of love
I shall wash them with my tears
a male Magdalene
And I shall follow your flag
even if you deny me
When wounded in battle
I shall enter your tent
and kiss every wound
and body’s every pore
and orifices wounding which themselves
are wound-like
And from dung I shall sprout roses
When all have gone home
after golden oratory
I shall stay the winter
burning pages of the Koran, if need be
to keep you warm
And since no boys, nor birds
fall out of the sky these days
I shall forage for physical bread
for the physical body
And when it’s found
lay it at your feet as trophy
When you’ve done with the repast
I shall wash your dishes
so that, just so that, you shall say:
This man has done for me more
than any woman, my own mother
included.

(*Translated from Urdu by Hoshang Merchant*)

KUTTIREVATHI

Kuttirevathi, who resides in Chennai, has published two volumes of her Tamil poetry.

LIGHT PROWLS LIKE A CAT

Opening doors without a sound,
Light puts its hand out (diffidently)
To check whether it's still raining

Then, finding the rains gone,
Light spreads out its ware of shadows
All over the woods; then climbs and perches
Over the tent's façade, idly to watch the world

Everywhere on earth, the pretty colours of a cat's body

When its shadow has begun
To devour itself, Light climbs quickly
Down from the tree; and then leaps
Straight to a lamp's small flame in the alcove

Seated on the back of the night, standing
Rigid and erect as a fortress wall,
Light draws in and makes its own, the Great
Light of love's union, through the moon's wide eye

GREY BIRD

The tree's shadow
Sat still beneath its canopy
Like a Grey Bird

As if to grab and carry away even
The stretched silence of that street,
A girl came down, sweeping

It was here that
He'd asked me to wait
Had asked my love too

The sweeper
Went away long ago, taking
The silence with her, as she kept
Turning back to stare at me

Darkness has now begun to stream down
Like tears. Enchanted and fearful,
Like a body ready to arrive
At its flowering, I wait

Here…he is walking in from afar,
Like a laden cloud about to unburden
Itself of rain
At this unbearable joy,
Red stars have begun to spring in my body

The tree, though,
Is still: unperturbed in the least,
Like a Grey Bird

BREASTS

Breasts are bubbles rising
In wet swamps

I wondrously watched, and guarded,
Their gradual swell and blooming
At the edges of my youth's season

Saying nothing to anyone else,
They sing along
With me alone, always:
Of heartbreak,
Love,
Rapture

To the nurseries of my turning seasons,
They never once failed or forgot
To bring arousal

During my penance, they seem to want to break free;
And in the fierce pull of lust, they rise,
Engorged with memories of musical trance

Like two teardrops of an unfulfilled love
That cannot ever be wiped away,
They brim, as in a still puddle

(*Translated from Tamil by Kalyan Raman*)

KALPANA ACHARYA

Kalpana Acharya has published Oriya poems in many journals of her home state. Her poetry forcefully articulates feminine ambition, without a stance of defiance or rebelliousness.

THE GOLDEN CAGE

For once, at least,
release me from this
golden cage of your family
and its aura of heavenly happiness,
pull apart this silky curtain
of attachment without reason
before my eyes.

Unfasten that chain
of soaked affection, woven
with the anguish
of our loving expectations,
from the deep concern of my mind;
cut off in your own hand
that string of soft velvet
of your charmed fancies.

Let my desires fly
on their winged fancies
for once at least,
my desires captive
in the golden dish, the silver urn
and the shining bunch of grapes
of your gifted acres;

let them fly unconcerned,
in the remote fragrance
of the sandalwood jungles
across that distant hill,
the home of the wild flowers.

HANDCUFFS

This small garden
rich with the smells
of so many tender feelings
of our sweet bondage;
the credit goes to you
while you lounge behind the screen.
I am a mere gardener.

The rest that seems barren,
full of the ashes of loss
of burnt down crops
are perhaps my own tricks!

Whom shall I blame,
my fate that manipulates me
like a marionette
at the tips of its cruel fingers,
or my own helpless innocence?

What is the use of
throwing mud after all?
you are the man
who holds the strings
across a safe distance, always.

After each scene,
when the curtain falls,
that smiling gentleman in you
takes stock of
all those knotty arguments
that contradict each other,
while I stand in the witness box
governed by your laws,
condemned to the handcuffs of slander,
with silence and tears.

Kalpana Acharya

THE RIVER AND THE WOMAN

O river! you are bound
to a vow from your very birth
that you won't overflow your banks.

You'd be flowing on
in your snaky bed of sands
in your due course.

Like you also, I am
a woman forbidden to cross
the line of decorum,
the decent traditions
of my father and husband
while following the winding roads
of my own small world.

Your banks are branded
with the sketches
of so many wounds of time,
of the burnt ashes of my ancestors,
of the crops destroyed
in drought and floods,
while I carry on my back
that dirty sack of memories,
the marks of a burning fight,
soaked with tears and blood.

I am almost buried
under a heap of tales of torment
of those escaped seasons,
in your sands,
while an under current
of some forgotten tune
of sweetness flows within.

I am branded
with an obsolete impress
of a wife, mother or sister;
a song of an exile
in a lonely island moans within.

(*Translated from Oriya by Bibhudatta Mohanty*)

ANTARYAMI MISHRA

Antaryami Mishra, who is a lecturer in English at a college in Puri District, has published in many of the leading poetry magazines of Orissa.

THE CROSSING

When the afternoon of a tropical sun
mellows down, and the shades of coco-palms
have grown longer,
I feel restless until
I arrive at the crossing.

There, a tea-stall inside
a worn out thatched hut--
its walls made from
criss-crossed bamboo strippings
and a paste of sticky soil--
waits for me along with
its couple of vacant benches
and the usual entrance and exit
of listeners and speakers.

Often I have to give explanation
at 'home' regarding my fancy
headed for the crossing,
and how tea, cigarettes and betel
are available on credit.

It won't be surprising
if they think that I have hit a gold mine
or experienced the prohibited thrill
of a sweet sixteen,
soaked with love.

The one that might have
understood our only resource,
the skill of enjoying food on credit
and yet being trustworthy,
is Nalu, the little boy without guile,

extending us our cups of tea
with his usual smile.
Perhaps, he would have been
going to school now
with his satchel of books.

It's not impossible that
a secret investigation
is being carried out behind us,
whether we are sycophants
or foot-lickers involved in
bribery, lying or fraudulence
such doubts won't be totally
out of place if you observe
the so called big ones today.

Nalu! We don't consider you
small or insignificant.
Speak the truth of whatever you see,
without any expediency of your own,
how we are carried in the wind
like homing birds returning from the setting sun,
and glide down to sit before you.

When the evening star sparkles,
the twitter of our happiness and grief
comes to an end,
a line of a poem
perches silently, while
receiving a cup of tea
from your tender hand.
My chest throbs like the printing press
in a strange pleasure
and I remember the more
the crossing and Nalu's tea, so dear!

(*Translated from Oriya by Bibhudatta Mohanty*)

USHA KISHORE

WHY TAGORE?

On mentioning to a literary acquaintance that Tagore is one of the poets included in my research project, I was pelted with the question: "Why Tagore?" My answer was "Why not Tagore?" As a School and University student in Kerala, in the ’70s and ’80s, I was taught Chaucer, the Romantics and the Victorians. I was exposed to very little Tagore or any other Indian Writer in English, for that matter. However, I had a good sampling of Tagore, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu at the insistence of my mother, a Hindi teacher. My mother strongly believed that one has to be aware of one's literary heritage. Hopefully, things have changed now and school and college students are exposed to their heritage. If you could be taught Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Donne, surely Tagore could be studied as well. If the Indian psyche can digest Middle English and the Metaphysicals, it seems absurd to dismiss Tagore as being in a different time and place. As an English teacher in the British Secondary sector, I found that Tagore was part of the Secondary English Curriculum and I had great pleasure in introducing the world poet to my English classes.

Tagore is one poet who has been honoured and dishonoured, both at home and abroad. The Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* (1913) saw great enthusiasm for Tagore, both in India and the West. The eclipse of the Western interest in Tagore led to his fall from favour in India. Strangely enough, Western trends of favour and disfavour for Indian writers evoke a similar Indian response. India has been independent for the past 54 years; but she is yet to break the shackles of 'Literary Colonialism.’ The Indian trends of honouring writers after the West has showered its accolades on them is not a novel development. This phenomenon is apparent in the case of contemporary writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundathi Roy and even Sir Vidyadhar Naipaul. As far as Tagore is concerned, the Indian literary elite has developed amnesia to the fact that he was the first writer to put India in the map of World Literature.

Some of the factors that resulted in Tagore's eclipse in the West were the rise of Nazism/Fascism, the World War scenario, Tagore's renunciation of his knighthood following the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre, his winning of the Nobel Prize over Thomas Hardy, his condemnation of the British Raj in India and his internationalist approach. In India, Tagore's differences with Gandhi on the issues of Nationalism and Non Co-operation made him unpopular. Tagore opposed Gandhi's idea of the *charka*, the symbol of self-reliance. Instead, Tagore wanted a deeper investigation by economists into the root of Indian self-sufficiency. Tagore wanted the independence of India, but he called for a co-operation between Britain and India. This One-World ideology of Tagore was not appreciated in *Swadeshi* India. Tagore was concerned about the Indian treatment of women and children, the caste system and the economic exploitation of the rural areas of India. He wanted India to be a secular state and also challenged Hindu revivalism; he advocated the unity of diverse religions such as Islam and Hinduism. These issues raised in Tagore's work are concerns of contemporary India.

Till 1913, Tagore was criticised by the Bengali Press as anglophile. It was only after his death in 1941 that he was proclaimed Bengal's minion. However, in the 1950s Tagore and other pioneers of Indian Poetry in English, like Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, suffered decline under the auspices of the *Writer's Workshop* of Calcutta. The *Kavita Manifesto* of 1959, edited by P.Lal and Raghavendra Rao, launched an offensive against the practice of the older school of poets (Dwivedi 27-32). The *Manifesto* advocated Queen's English and felt that "poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience." The *Manifesto* wanted to see the end of Indo-Anglian Romanticism. Dom Moraes, a British citizen, dismissed the early poets like Tagore with the comment that "Wordsworth had more talent in his little toe" (qtd. in Mehrotra 195). Some sceptics including Nissim Ezekiel called the best post-1947 poets "a Pseudo-Keats, second-rate Tennyson, a third-rate Hardy and fourth-rate Eliot" (qtd. in Das 19). Perhaps

these literary figures were asking for recognition of their own work by degrading the pioneers, by breaking away from tradition, and by introducing a new school of poets. These poets wanted to be linked to British and American writers of the times and not to their Indian predecessors. They failed to realise that Indian Poetry in English cannot be compared with Western literatures, but could be measured in a multicultural format incorporating both Western and Eastern principles, since the creation is in the language of one culture and the creativity belongs to another.

However, since the late 1960s, there has been many an attempt to revive Tagore in India. A Tagore revivalism took shape under Humayun Kabir, K.R.S. Iyengar and others, who wrote extensively in defence of Tagore. Later, their attempts were taken up by M.K.Naik, G.N.Devy and others, who called for new attention to the pioneers of Indian Poetry in English. The translations of UK based writers like Ketaki Kushari Dyson, William Radice and more recently Joe Winter, have promoted Tagore interest in the West, and due credit must be given to the members of the Tagore Centre in London who have initiated a Tagore revivalism in the West.

Tagore lived and wrote during a crucial period in history. His works brought about a renaissance in all walks of Indian life--social, political, religious, literary, artistic, philosophic and educational. Even if for a brief period, Tagore succeeded in bringing the East and the West "into receptive emotional and intellectual contact" (Dutta and Robinson 2). He called for local independence and global interdependence. Looking at Tagore from a contemporary Indian point of view, the visionary element is one aspect that deserves consideration. Tagore had dreamed of East-West co-operation and cultural exchange in the early part of the twentieth century. In contemporary India, where Western trends seem to be catching like wild fire, it is the right time to re-examine Tagore. Another fact worth examining is that Tagore is part of India's rich heritage. Indians are now at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. There seems to be a clash between the traditionalist

Indians and their Westernised counterparts. Tagore had bridged the gap between the Manichean polarities of the Western *self* and the Eastern *other*. He had succeeded in bringing about a balance between Western ideas and Eastern ideology. This balance is something that India is striving to achieve today. The ongoing religious tensions, the confrontation between the old and new, the struggle to form an Indian identity which has imbibed traditional values and met the challenges of Western doctrines--all seem to be re-echoes of Tagore's work. Tagore does not immerse readers in a past that is left behind but inspires them to confront a present as a historical moment. His work defines the relationship between history and culture by exposing the conflicts and contradictions of the East and the West in the colonial era, and by providing insights into the dynamic syntheses that resolve these conflicts.

Although Tagore experimented with three different genres, he is best known for his poetry. Tagore's poetry is the literature of renascence--"a literary aesthetic and reality based on the emergence of a third world personality from the privations of history" (Dash 200). Tagore's poetry carries transhistorical and transcultural significance as it defines the Colonial and Post-colonial eras of Indian Writing in English. It is a dynamic interaction of Fanon's three phases: the cultural nationalist phase, the revolutionary phase and the assimilationist phase (Amuta 158-59). Tagore's poetry would help both Indian and Western readers to grasp the colonial past and the multicultural present and to see the evolution of multiculturalism from colonialism. His poetry is a multicultural mélange, where the Indian *marga* (classical) and *desi* (folk) traditions interact with Western literary doctrines, incorporating Sufi mysticism, *Vaishnavite* ideals, Bengali *baul* lyrics,[1] Indian myth, folklore and philosophy. Significant Western influences include literature and philosophy. This post-colonial intermingling of languages and cultures is very much a part of the Tagore repertoire. In him, you can see Indian tradition actively meeting the challenges of Western influences. Tagore is both a traditionalist and a modernist.

The poetry of Tagore is incomplete without *Gitanjali*, which is the quintessence of all things Tagorean. *Gitanjali* is a collection of verses, explicating the poet's quest for the Divine. Written in prose style, in the form of a monologue, the collection represents the poet's faith in the unity of man and nature, and unifies diverse ideologies.

In *Gitanjali*, the two centres of Sufi consciousness (Human and Divine) are juxtaposed with the Hindu concept of *Atma* (self) and *Paramatma* (divine Self):

> The day was when I did not keep myself
> in readiness for thee; and entering my
> heart unbidden even as one of the common
> crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou
> didst press the signet of eternity upon
> many a fleeting moment of my life. (XLIII)

The Sufi ideology of effeminate, platonic love for God, coupled with nature imagery, is one of the characteristics of *Gitanjali* :

> As the night keeps hidden in its gloom
> the petition for light, even thus in the
> depths of my consciousness rings the
> cry--'I want thee, only thee.' (XXXVIII)

The Sufi tenets of direct approach to God, Universality, the brotherhood of man, the passage of time during man's journey in search of his divine lover, the identity of the self with the Supreme Self and the concept of God as King are all scattered among the verses of *Gitanjali*. The All-Supreme formless God of Sufism/Islam intermingles with the *Vaishnavite* Personal God in *Gitanjali*. The mysticism and the contemplation of the nature of God, and the unification of the personal and cosmic aspects of Divine Nature may be due to the influence of the *Bhakti* poet, Kabir, who was an exponent of Islam-Hindu synthesis. Tagore's

God is his life-force, his *Jiban debta*,[2] and at the same time the All-Pervading. This Tagorean concept of the confluence of Islam and Hinduism is perhaps a panacea for the current religious strife between these two religions.

Gitanjali epitomises the Bengali *baul* concept of the eternal homeless wanderer, who searches for God, in synchronisation with the Universe:

> Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens,
> Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait out-
> side at the door all alone….
> I keep gazing on the far-away gloom
> of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing
> with the restless wind. (XVIII)

In *Gitanjali*, Tagore illustrates the various *Vaishnavite* approaches to God--God as father, God as king and God as beloved:

> …thou who art the King
> of kings hast decked thyself in beauty to
> captivate my heart. And for this thy love
> loses itself in the love of thy lover, and there
> art thou seen in the perfect union of two. (LVI)

Tagore's portrayal of love is based on the *Bhakti* concept. Love for the divine is manifested in conjugal love, fraternal and paternal love, and affection between friends. The *Advaita* tendency of seeking God in oneself, the concept of the Cosmic *Lila* where God seeks man and *vice versa*, and the attraction between the finite and the infinite are also pictured in *Gitanjali*:

> Deliverance? Where is deliverance
> to be found? Our master himself has joy-
> fully taken upon him the bonds of creation;
> he is bound with us all for ever. (XI)

The longing and pining of the lover for her divine beloved, the pain of parting, the anxiety for meeting and the sending of messages are all characteristic of the medieval *Vaishnavite* poet, Mirabai:

> Have you not heard his silent steps? He
> comes, comes, ever comes….
> In sorrow after sorrow, it is his steps
> that press upon my heart, and it is the
> golden touch of his feet that makes my
> joy to shine. (XLV)

The Eco-mystical concept of seeing God in forms of nature is also a *Vaishnavite* element. Tagore was influenced by the *Vaishnavite* poets of Bengal like Jayadeva and Krishna Chaitanya. Jayadeva's *Gita-Govinda* is based on the Radha-Krishna theme and brings an erotic element to the *Prakriti-Purusha* dichotomy, while the innate Bengali Vaishnavism of Chaitanya celebrates Krishna consciousness. Tagore opts for the mid-way between these two concepts. The idea of the divine flute-player comes across clearly in *Gitanjali*:

> This little flute of reed thou hast
> carried over hills and dales, and hast
> breathed through it melodies eternally new. (I)

The *Prakriti-Purusha* dichotomy contemplated in Tagore's works is based on nature (*Prakriti*) and the supernatural (*Purusha*). To Tagore, this idea is not a simple binary opposition but two equally important aspects of transcendent reality:

> Thou art the sky and thou art the nest
> as well.
> O thou beautiful, there in the nest it
> is thy love that encloses the soul with
> colours and sounds and odours….

> But there, where spreads the infinite
> sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns
> the stainless white radiance. There is no
> day nor night, nor form nor colour, and
> never, never a word. (LXVII)

The influence of Kalidasa can be detected in Tagore's work. As a child, Tagore was tutored in Kalidasa's poetry. His *Meghaduta* is a transcreation of Kalidasa's poem of the same name. Like Kalidasa, Tagore is a traditionalist and a romantic. The description of *flora* and *fauna* and the seasons, especially the monsoons, in Tagore's poetry is an inheritance of Kalidasa. Tagore's descriptions of the *bakula*, the *ketaki* and *kadamba* trees and the *malati* flowers seem to be straight out of Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara*. Tagore's observation of nature, his skill in depicting the Indian landscape in vivid colours, his concept of man and nature interpenetrating each other are very much Kalidasan. The "Urvashi" (*Collected Poems and Plays* [*CPP*] 409-10) of Tagore can be considered a descendant of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvashiyam.* To those who are currently engaged in the revival of classical Sanskrit Literature and Hindu traditions, Tagore's poetry would be worth visiting, as he has interpreted these ideologies in an approachable, almost contemporary context.

Tagore does not stop with Hinduism and Islam; he has also experimented with Biblical concepts, as illustrated in "The Son of Man" (*CPP* 453-54) and *The Child*. *The Child* is a very significant piece of Tagore's work. The poem seems like a passion-play and portrays Mahatma Gandhi as the Man of Faith, comparing him to Jesus Christ. Gandhi comes as a messiah and saviour of the Indian people in the troubled night of British Rule. Like Christ, Gandhi is martyred for his cause:

> …for in his death he lives in the life of us all, the
> great Victim.

The resurrection is enacted in the birth of India's independence:

> They kneel down--the king and the beggar, the saint
> and the sinner, the wise and the fool--and cry:
> Victory to man, the new-born, the ever-living!

In "The Son of Man," Tagore recreates the crucifixion of Christ:

> And the Son of Man in agony cries, "My God, My
> God, why hast Thou forsaken ME?"

Thus, the Tagorean concept of Unity in Diversity is realised in his portrayal and attempted integration of all the major religions.

Tagore was an internationalist and stood against the "narrowing creed" of nationalism. This notion was thoroughly misunderstood. As a result, his patriotism has come under fire, time and again. Tagore condemned British exploitation of Indian resources, but he refused to deny Western values because of the tyranny of the Raj. The Indian National Anthem, selected in the 1950s, was composed by Tagore in 1911. There is some controversy surrounding this. The song was officially written for the meeting of the Indian National Congress, but many critics are of the opinion that it might have been composed for the occasion of George V's coronation. Tagore's patriotism, doomed as ambivalent by many of his critics, clarifies itself in his poetry. The cry of "Mother, open the gate" in *The Child* is perhaps a vision of India's independence, which is also visualised in *Gitanjali*:

> Where the mind is without fear and the
> head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free….
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
> let my country awake. (XXXV)

Tagore studied many Western poets in detail and their influences have inevitably filtered into his poetry. These influences

are many. Although Tagore has been dubbed the Shelley of Bengal, he is closer to Keats. The sensitivity and sensuality of Keats has certainly had its effect on Tagore. The Keatsian ideology of Truth and Beauty, as expressed in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," can be considered the predecessor of the Tagorean theory that truth and beauty are realised through 'man.' Tagore explores myths in true Keatsian fashion and presents them in epic proportions. Keats brings to light the lesser-known figures from Greek and Roman mythology such as Endymion, Hyperion and Lamia, while Tagore adopts the lesser known Hindu mythical personalities such as Urvashi and Chitra (one of the wives of Arjuna, the Pandava hero of the Indian epic, *Mahabharatha*).

The Keatsian technique of personification is adapted by Tagore. In Keats's "Autumn," the season comes alive:

> Who has not seen thee oft amid thy store?
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind…. (*Keats* 243)

In *Lover's Gift* (*CPP* 253-67), Tagore describes the same season in great detail and the whole cycle of seasons is brought into play. The harvest season is personified as Lakshmi, the Hindu Goddess of Prosperity:

> …the mother, throned on the fullness of golden autumn; she who in the harvest-time brings straying hearts to the smile sweet as tears…. (*CPP* 264)

Tagore's "Urvashi" can be compared with Keats's "La Belle dame sans Merci." Both women are enchantresses who destroy men. Urvashi, "neither mother, nor daughter, nor bride," rises from the sea with the cup of life in her right hand and poison in her left, while *La Belle Dame* with her "long hair, light foot and wild eyes," leaves "death-pale" warriors, kings and princes in her wake.

The Blakean concept of humanising God seems to have contributed to the creation of Tagore's Jiban Debta. Like Blake, Tagore championed the cause of the downtrodden and rebelled against social injustice. Tagore's panoramic vision of mystic fulfilment seems a Blakean concept:

> At the immortal touch of thy hands my
> little heart loses its limits in joy and gives
> birth to utterance ineffable. (*Gitanjali* I)

His descriptions of the beauty and cruelty of nature also appear Blakean:

> God's right hand is gentle, but terrible is his left hand.
> (*Stray Birds* CCXI)

The following verse (XII) from *Stray Birds* can be compared to Blake's portrayal of eternity:

> "What language is thine O sea?"
> "The language of eternal question"
> "What language is thy answer, O sky?"
> "The language of eternal silence."

Like John Donne, Tagore personifies and allegorises Death. Death to him is a grand revelation of Truth. There is no fear of Death, only an interaction with it:

> I have suffered and despaired and known death and I
> am glad that I am in this great world.
> (*Stray Birds* CCXXII)

Tagore believes that the All Beautiful is waiting for him and after death, he would be united with his Divine lover:

> O Thou the last fulfilment of life, Death,
> my death, come and whisper to me….

After the wedding the bride shall leave her
home and meet her lord alone in the solitude
of night. (*Gitanjali* XCI)

Indian mythology inevitably finds its way into Tagore's depiction of death. He addresses Yama, the God of Death:

Death, thy servant is at my door. He
has crossed the unknown sea and brought
thy call to my home….
It is thy messenger who stands at my door… (LXXXVI)

Tagore's championship of the child can be traced back to his youth. In 1883, twenty-two year old Tagore was married to ten year old Mrinalini. Child marriage was very much a part of the then Hindu tradition. Even today, this is one of the problems confronted by rural India. Tagore's relationship with his wife and his inward struggle with his marriage has been the subject of many of his poems, as in his "Loving Conversation of a Newly-wedded Bengali Couple":

Groom:
Soul unto soul in bashful whirl
we are joined together in this place….
Tell me once, Mine 'I am truly thine
None other do I wish to embrace.'
Bride: (tearfully)
I am going to sleep with my nurse. (Dutta and Robinson 104)

In spite of his objections to the practice of child marriage, Tagore could not break the fetters of tradition; two of his daughters were child brides. In later life, Tagore regretted this fact, and his championship of women and children was a result of his profound sense of regret.

The evocation of the child in many of Tagore's major works like *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener* (*CPP* 89-147) is comparable to the Wordsworthean logic of "The Child is father of the man." In "On the Seashore" of *The Crescent Moon*, children are considered comrades of the Eternal:

> *On the seashore of endless*
> *worlds the children meet with shouts and dance....*
> *They seek not for hidden treasures, they*
> *know not how to cast nets.* (*CPP* 51-52)

The concept of childhood and its mysteries appeals to Tagore. Later, in "Paper Boats," he tries to re-create within himself, the experiences of a child:

> Day by day I float my paper boats one by one down the running stream….
> I load my little boats with **shiuli** flowers from our garden.…
> The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and the lading is their baskets full of dreams. (*CPP* 67-68)

To him, the child bridges heaven and earth. Perhaps the death of his children at very young ages instigated Tagore, in "The End" of *Crescent Moon*, to intermingle life and death into the child concept:

> It is time for me to go, mother: I am going….
> I shall become a dream, and through the little opening of your eyelids I shall slip into the depths of your sleep; and when you wake up and look around startled, like a twinkling firefly I shall flit out into the darkness. (*CPP* 80-81)

Tagore's camaraderie with nature and his search for the supernatural in nature certainly mirrors the British romantics. The

pastoral realism, the visionary exaltation and the intuitive symbolism are all Wordsworthean elements.

Tagore's part in the Bengali literary renaissance can be compared to Yeats's Celtic revival. Yeats, like Tagore had been influenced by the *Upanishads* and Indian spirituality. Both writers search for a style, which mirrors a quest for the selfhood in a post-colonial context. Jahan Ramazani calls Yeats an "anticolonial" poet (qtd. in Bahri) and Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* attributes decolonisation of land and language to Yeats. Tagore can also be characterised by the same qualities.

Tagore was a great admirer of Walt Whitman and has translated some of his prose-poems into Bengali. Tagore's own prosaic style of poetry is considered to be the influence of Whitman. Tagore's use of free verse is connected with the French *vers-libre* and post-Georgian English poetry by many critics. However, this use of prosaic style and free-verse does not hinder the rhythm in Tagore's poetry.

Professor K.R.S. Iyengar highlights a Hopkinsian trend in Tagore. According to Iyengar (16), the Hopkinsian idea of "frail clay" is transformed into the "frail vessel" in *Gitanjali*:

> Thou hast made me endless, such is thy
> pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest
> again and again, and fillest it ever
> with fresh life. (I)

The Hopkinsian allegory of spiritual struggle and realisation, is recurrent in Tagore's poetry, as expressed in verse XLI of *Fruitgathering* (*CPP* 196-97):

> The Boatman is out crossing the wild sea at night.
> The mast is aching because of its full sails filled with
> the violent wind.

> Stung with the night's fang the sky falls upon the
> sea, poisoned with black fear….
> Only light shall fill the house, blessed shall be the
> dust, and the heart glad.
> All doubts vanish in silence when the Boatman
> comes to the shore.

Tagore was christened as the Goethe of India by none other than Albert Schweitzer, for his principles of universality and humanity. In *Stray Birds*, Tagore's vision of the universal Man and his concept of fraternity makes man equal to God:

> God kisses the finite in his love and man the infinite.
> (*CPP* 326)

Tagore's work can also be paralleled with that of Goethe in its combination of thought and experience, the emotional and the intellectual, the sensuous and the spiritual, and the individual and the collective.

Aspects of Eco-feminism can be glimpsed in Tagore's projection of the female force of Nature. The poet asks the woman among the tall grasses in Verse LXIV of *Gitanjali*:

> "…Maiden, your lights are all lit--then where
> do you go with your lamp?"

She replies, "I have come… to dedicate my lamp to the sky." This portrayal of woman as part of nature develops into the effeminate alter-ego of the poet:

> She who ever had remained in the depth
> of my being, in the twilight of gleams and
> glimpses; she who never opened her
> veils in the morning light, will be my last
> gift to thee, my God.… (LXVI)

There is a diversity in Tagore's portrayal of woman. Woman is variously pictured as Mother, Motherland, the lover, the seductress, the village belle who fetches water and longs for her beloved, and life-force or *Jiban Debta*. In *The Gardener*, even sleep is portrayed as a woman:

> Sleep had laid her fingers upon the eyes of the earth.
> (*CPP* 125)

Tagore has indeed awakened Goethe's Eternal Woman. If interpreted in the contemporary feminist critique, the sensual "female" side and the cultural "feminine side" can be seen in Tagore's women (Showalter). The "otherness" as expressed in contemporary feminist criticism does not exist in Tagore's poetry. In his visionary way, the poet has tried to give an equal stance to womanhood.

In Tagore's time, this desire for equality and justice for women certainly meant going against the grain of a tradition that advocated child marriage, ostracised widows, denied education to women, and condemned equality among the sexes. In the lyrical play, *Chitra* (*CPP* 173), the heroine is projected as a woman seeking equality and justice:

> I am Chitra. No goddess to be
> worshipped, nor yet the object of
> common pity to be brushed aside like
> a moth with indifference.

Chitra is based on the Indian epic *Mahabharatha*. She is one of the wives of the epic hero, Arjuna. Chitrangada (Chitra) is the warrior-princess of Manipur, whom Arjuna meets during his wanderings as an ascetic. At the end of the play, in Scene IX, Chitra reveals her empowerment and demands equality. To the Western generalisers, who consider the eastern woman as the “long-suffering other,” this claim is an eye-opener. To the Indian tenet that often evokes the

Manu Smrithi verse, "*Na Sthree swatantryam arhathe*" (No woman deserves freedom), Chitra is an all-time challenge. Tagore has re-thought "the assumptions made about women and the female character" in this play (Jehlen). He projects the social and spiritual context of women in Chitra. In his orthodox world, Tagore has created the new entity that is Chitra, a woman demanding equality. He has re-interpreted Hindu mythology, and at the same time challenged male dominance, patriarchy and cultural stereotypes. Tagore's Chitra is the precursor of today's emancipated woman. This ideology was instrumental in creating a self-awareness among women during and after the Indian Independence struggle. Tagore's woman is not passive, but an empowered entity. In spite of all the progress that India has made, the Indian woman still seems to be struggling for equality and justice. *Chitra* is certainly worth exploring in the context of contemporary Indian Womanhood.

Tagore's poetry may be innately Indian but it has a universal appeal, and his concerns range from Women's and Children's rights to individual liberty and internationalism. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Free India, said of Tagore: "For all his Indianness, he was essentially a person of international mould and thinking" (qtd. in Machure 17). In "To Africa," Tagore's humanity has made him express concerns for that continent:

> The savage greed of the civilised stripped naked its
> unashamed inhumanity.
> You wept and your cry was smothered,
> Your forest trails became muddy with tears and blood,
> while the nailed boots of the robbers
> left their indelible prints
> along the history of your indignity.

He prophesied the World War I in "The Sunset of the Century":

> The last sun of the century sets amidst the
> blood-red clouds of the West and the
> whirlwind of hatred. (*Nationalism* 80)

And in a poem composed on Christmas Day, 1937, he anticipated the atrocities of Nazi Germany and the Second World War:

> Everywhere
> The serpents exhale their poisonous breath;
> To speak of gentle peace sounds like mockery.
> Let me therefore, before I depart,
> Send my last greetings to those
> Who everywhere are making ready
> To give battle to the Monster of Evil. (qtd. in Iyengar 39)

He also denounced nationalism in Japan, Europe and China, in addition to his opposition to European imperialism. He strongly objected to social injustices like the Jewish oppression in Europe, the lynching of negroes in the USA, and the atrocities against Africa. He questioned the Western ideas of democracy and freedom in the light of imperialism and colonialism. Tagore's concerns share contemporary views of liberty and equality, and highlight international co-operation and exchange. Tagore's poetry can also be re-examined in a contemporary pacifist and human rights context, as he has addressed these factors in his poetry.

Tagore's poetry has received a barrage of criticism for being "too sentimental." But, as Professor M.K.Naik has pointed out (163), this emotionality or excessive sentimentality is a hybrid of the *rasa* or sentimentality of Sanskrit poetry and the volatile Bengali emotionality; and uninhibited emotion is very much a part of the Indian psyche and tradition. Tagore's poetry was primarily written for Indians. If the West is to understand the poetry of Tagore, it has to appreciate and empathise with the Indian context. And if Indians would momentarily discard their new-found Western mask, they could certainly see their own inherent expression of emotionality in Tagore. Another criticism is Tagore's use of the pathetic fallacy. Again Naik suggests (165) that this is not purely Western imitation, but an innate Indian tradition seen from the age of Sanskrit poetry more than two thousand years ago.

The West has often dubbed Tagore as the mimic poet; but his poetry is far from mimicry. He is certainly not a "mimic man" who reinforces colonial authority, but a multicultural figure, who challenges imperialism and advocates equality.

While studying Tagore, another subject that needs reviewing is translation. Many writers, Indian and Western, have translated Tagore. Among the Indians, the translations of Aurobindo Bose, Krishna Kripalani, Amiya Chakravarthy and Sisir Kumar Das are prominent. Well-known British translators include William Radice (1985), Ketaki Kushari Dyson (1992), and Joe Winter (2000). The English translations of Tagore have always been a crucial point of controversy. Many Indian critics including the ardent Tagore enthusiast K.R.S. Iyengar (31-32) have come down heavily upon them. Krishna Kripalani feels that "the author's own attempt was suicidal; ours can only be murderous." Iyengar concludes that the English versions lose the Bengali music and exuberance. Sujit Mukherjee calls them "perjury" (qtd. in Trivedi a2), while Harish Trivedi (a2) suggests that if the English translations are inadequate and misleading to the originals, the studies of Tagore by eminent Non-Bengalis such as S.Radhakrishnan and K.R.S.Iyengar are necessarily flawed. The idea of Buddhadeva Bose (Trivedi a2-a3) that the readers have to learn Bengali to appreciate Tagore's greatness seems at times esoteric. To appreciate literature in a multicultural world, English translations are the only plausible solution.

Tagore himself was aware of the difficulties in translation. In a letter to Edward Thompson, Tagore confesses to the sins of omission and commission in his translations. Tagore seems to have left out "the local, specific and original" in his work as he feared that "it would prove unfamiliar and difficult" (Trivedi a1) to an English reader. His translations express the struggle for space created by the transformation of the Indian text and context into the English language.

Tagore translated *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* in 1915. This work was well received in much of Europe. It was almost immediately translated into Spanish. In England an unnamed reviewer writing for the *Times Literary Supplement* (cited *Imagining Tagore*, 5 August 1915) felt that *One Hundred poems of Kabir* will be given a permanent place in the European treasury of devotional thought. Similarly a *Birmingham Daily Post* review (cited *Imagining Tagore*, 19 March 1915) compared Tagore's translations of Kabir with the authorised version of the poetical works of the Bible. Even many contemporary British anthologies include Tagore's translations of Kabir. If Tagore could do justice to Kabir in a so-called "transcreation" or "transmutation," surely the translation of his own work could be given some authenticity.

Many of Tagore's Britain-based translators want to give his poetry an *English* form and style. Tagore's use of Indian English and his beautiful prosaic style, akin to that of Walt Whitman, does not seemingly appeal to a British audience. In Britain, where the colonial spirit is yet to be exorcised, Tagore's own translations have been doomed as unsatisfactory and his phraseology considered unsuitable for the English reader. William Radice says in his introduction to *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems* (31) that Tagore's translations are unsatisfactory and that "any English reader will be worried by phrases such as 'My Darling,' 'the speech of the learned,' or 'Alas for me.'" Isn't this so-called concern of the English readers perpetuating superiority of some cultures over others? These comments are grounded on a set of assumptions that impose Western grids for the translation of non-Western cultures into Western categories (Lefevere 77). They certainly reflect the confrontation between two cultural realities.

Tagore's English has given birth to a powerful inter-language that is today's Indian English. This fact seems to be overlooked. It is time that the English readers of multicultural Britain and Westernised Indian readers recognise the "difference" of Indian English. Multiculturalism has proved that the idea of language and

culture binding members of a national community is a myth. Global communication has created an international mass, which competes and interacts with the local. The usage of non-standard English words, the importation of indigenous words into English, and the use of established English equivalents of indigenous cultural concepts all serve to facilitate this intercultural transposition (cf Tymoczko 23-26). Isn't the translation of a literary work from a different culture meant to be a sharing of customs, traditions and contexts, rather than just a linguistic exercise? One is forced to quote Salman Rushdie here: "…we can't simply use the language in the way the British did… it needs remaking for our own purposes"(Rushdie 17).

Although new translations of Tagore give new interpretations of the text and add colour to his poetry, the translators are imposing Western standards to an Indian text. They are attempting to translate an Eastern culture into a Western category. However praiseworthy the wonderful sense of poetry in the translations of Kushari, Dyson and Radice is, one wonders why the original translations of Tagore should be totally ignored. We would certainly be doing both Tagore and Indian Writing in English a disfavour by not appreciating Tagore's own translations. Of course, these new translations should not be ignored, either. They could certainly be compared with Tagore's originals and used to highlight the sensitive grounds of cultural exchange.

It is worth mentioning that to Indians, English is the legacy of colonialism; but over time, it has acquired its own indigenous colours. The imperial language has been internalised and used as an effective medium to portray a multifarious, Indian sensibility. Perhaps the current shift of paradigm away from Eurocentricism, towards *Ethnic Writing in English* would enable the international reader to understand and appreciate several realities: the translations of Tagore as a milestone in the history of Indian Poetry in English, the period and location of these creations in a post-colonial context, and the entity that is Indian English.

Over the years, there have been arguments and counter-arguments for the place of Tagore within the framework of Indian Poetry in English. However, the fact remains that the evolution of Indian Poetry in English can be traced through the poetry of Tagore--from the poet's initial translation of his own work to his subsequent writing in English. From a literary point of view, Tagore was one of the first to experiment with the post-colonial inter-language, by bringing in Indian English into his poetry and by the usage of indigenous words. He was also one of the pioneers who experimented with translations, which are a medium of communication in a post-colonial world that advocates multiculturalism and cultural literacy. The current global phenomenon of multiculturalism, bringing together the East and West, was Tagore's dream. Tagore's poetry is not subversive but assimilatory, marrying the rich traditions of the East and the West. Tagore needs to be re-examined in a post-colonial light for this purpose, because in a contemporary world the East-West cultural and literary exchange has increased, and Tagore was its *avant-courier*.

Notes

1. Bauls are folk singers of Bengal. Tagore was influenced by their songs and their philosophy, especially by the Baul singer, Jnandas.

2. Jiban Debta (literally translated "Life-God") is a Tagorean concept. Tagore has written a poem entitled *Jiban Debta* (*The Religion of Man*).

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HARA P. DAS

SITAKANT MAHAPATRA: TRADITION OF ORIYA POETRY AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

It is difficult to evaluate comprehensively a living poet who is still in his prime; it is even more difficult to evaluate his poetry in an historical context for its long-term impact on literature. These difficulties get compounded when he writes primarily in a regional language such as Oriya, represents a quest that is essentially Indian, and shows in his craft a play of spirit that is contemporary and global. Yet these difficulties provide the clues to Sitakant Mahapatra's poetry. A typical product of the conflict between the forces of rejection and affirmation, he provides a critical understanding of that life quest, offering a synthesis of the dialectical conflict between reason and passion in a life quest.

Mahapatra's life-quest, beginning from the publication forty years ago of his first anthology *Dipti O Dyuti* (*The Glow and the Illumination*, 1963) and continuing through the recent *Let Your Journey Be Long* (2001), includes intense poetic activity marked by continuous growth. Through all these volumes he has offered new images for the visions, hopes, and fears of his culture even as he has continued the old quest. His focus has been on the journey, not just of a poet but of an entire aesthetic mode of search for the final repose of art. His sense of continuity, his obsession with the quest, distinguishes Mahapatra from his contemporaries and peers.

Dipti O Dyuti marks the advent of a poet of substance in the Oriya poetic scene in 1963, a time when Oriya poetry was undergoing radical transformation. Sachi Routray had published one of his last major works (*Kabita* [*Poetry*], 1962); Guruprasad Mohanty had stopped writing since the publication of his last significant work (*Nutan Kabita* [*New Poetry*], 1955); and Ramakant Rath had published his first anthology of poems (*Kete Dinara* [*Time Past*], 1963). Routray had brought into Oriya poetry

an unorthodox fusion of symbolist vision and socialist concern, a brand of creativity new to the scene. He had given Oriya poets their first taste of *vers libre* and had already been acknowledged as the master. Through "Kalapurush," a poetic transcreation of "The Wasteland," Mohanty had introduced to the landscape of Oriya poetry the poetic idioms and sensibilities of T.S. Eliot. But he had also added, most significantly, a native poetic idiom that was lighter, more communicative, structurally free-flowing, and attractively breathless in its speech rhythm. Rath was different: he admired both Routray and Mohanty, but consciously remained outside the spheres of their influence. He spoke in a language that was unconventional, even outlandish, in its metaphorical signification. But behind this, he built the edifice of a new idiom that used language as a foil for thematic explorations: the cuts, the thrusts, the banters, the self-mocking inflections, and the mock-serious metaphysical confabulations were all in the game--a brooding giant mumbling his half-uttered song of despair. This was the literary scene into which Mahapatra entered with *Dipti O Dyuti* in 1963.

Mahapatra's first anthology was received with great expectations and a slight hesitation. Expectations were aroused by the directness of the idiom; hesitation came from the anxiety of losing the crest of the ruling fashion. In 1963 the prevailing Oriya poetry was marked by complexity of ideas, and a certain starkness in style. Poetry had become the poet's private obsession, and the reader had been alienated. Mahapatra departs from this inherited pattern, engaging his reader instead in a direct and dialogic conversation. He was there to see the sunset in the rear view mirror of a bus, and say

> Everything gone, vanished
> Strings of universes disappear forever,
> The pristine body sucks in through the pores of the skin,
> And all things taken in by the last rays of the sun.
> (*The Ruined Temple and Other Poems* [*RT*] 57)

Here is the beginning of the act of looking back. Direct communication and a sense of wonder for the illuminated world unfolding before them bond the readers with the poet in a ritualistic communion.

In *Astapadi* (*Eight Steps*, 1967) Mahapatra masks his direct speech under a veil of mythology--Kubja comes from *Mathuramangala*, Devaki from the *Bhagavat*, Solan from the nowhere island, and a whole cavalcade of mythical characters crowd the Oriya poetic scene. Here Mahapatra reveals the structure of his mythical imagination: contrary to the established style of myth-making, he presents a surface structure. He does not delve deep, for the Oriya poetic sensibility of the time was basically myth-ridden and nothing more than an act of transposition was required to establish contact. Finding deeper structures was neither logical, nor required. So, his Kubja remains essentially a Puranic metaphor arousing a deeper sensibility in the reader. This poetic technique has two implications: first, he makes no effort to redefine the human condition through his myths; and, second, the myths become metaphors without effort.

In the Indian context, the Puranic art of myth-making draws its strength largely from the directness of the narrative scheme, and this is exactly how Mahapatra recycles the material. It had been realized by then that he was not employing any particular technique, but was simply using the available material sincerely, faithfully, and directly. What appears as a lack of technique is in fact the technique: the direct statement of a narrative format becomes a technique of myth-making. This is risky, but Mahapatra takes the risk, and fashions for Oriya poetry a matrix of elementally simple dialectic thought whose principal vehicle is mythology in the form of collective memory.

Poems in *Shabdar Akash* (*The Sky of Words*, 1971) reveal a new development in Mahapatra's career. They bring into sharp focus two levels of experience--collective memory and personal memory. For Mahapatra, memory is a binary experience insofar as

the collective and the personal coexist not as separate entities but as dovetailed positions in alternating order. In *Shabdar Akash* he prefers the personal to the collective, but never loses sight of the fact that his personal memory must hold in its labyrinth the remains of a collective memory as stealthily as possible. In "The Aerodrome" he writes

> Aircraft gape like silver carp
> in the village tank, the aerodrome,
> the fish-pond of the afternoon
> beneath the sun-drenched varnish of the sky
> The rumbling chariot of night
> the heliograph of red and blue
> Homecoming and departure,
> the eternal strains of return and farewell.
> (*RT* 2-3)

The images of the airplane and the silver-scaled fish in the pond represent the binary roles of personal and collective memory--the airplane as a part of his personal memory, and the fish in the pond as a part of his collective memory--both received from the village as the primary unit of community living. Similarly, in "Bagicha" ("My garden") the seas go in search of islands and the sky goes in search of the mountain-peaks (*RT* 17). The sea's search for an island provides a figurative expression for locating stillness in time, and the sky's search for a mountain serves as a trope for finding a spatial definition of the limitless. Between the collective and the personal memory lies the little garden that symbolizes the process of living, and the two memories dovetail into each other to resolve the contrasts. The map of the poetic space in Mahapatra's poetry shows these three regions: the collective, the personal, and the immediate.

Inevitably, the themes of time and space emerge again in Mahapatra's *Samudra* (*The Sea*, 1977). In "Old Man in Summer," for example,

Dry leaves crossing the street
in a sudden gust of wind
bring traffic to a stop;
April's feeble voice recites
blood-sermons from the blue conflagration
of the sky, confusing
the bewildered birds.
(*RT* 86-87)

Mahapatra looks on Time as a season and Space as its configuration. In thus presenting Time and Space, he modifies our perception of the human predicament, and the modification takes three clear lines: first, the cloak of dejection is discarded ; second, the locale is redefined; and, finally, time and space are assigned specific roles. Mahapatra presents a new theory of human destiny, one that cuts through the classical-romantic façade of fatalism and weaves a brand new tapestry of optimism.

Mahapatra's poetry of the first fifteen years, up to the publication of *Chitranadi* (*The River of Images*, 1979) provides glimpses of his mastery of a poetic technique that distinguishes him from his contemporaries, a distinction that is at once a mark of idiomatic departure and personal signification. His technique is to exchange the image for the idea. Having begun as a symbolist, he has by this time perfected a poetic method that eschews overt symbolism. He has also acquired a speech rhythm free of images. He continues to use images and symbols, but only to exchange them for ideas at a later stage in a poem. In other words, he exchanges symbols for mythology and images for metaphors, departing from the contemporary practice to establish his own standard of generic poetry, a remarkable achievement in Oriya poetry at a time when poems were nothing if not images.

Chitranadi marks the consolidation of the technique of "exchange." In "Ghasaphula" ("The Grassblossom"), for instance, Mahapatra's purpose is to present a view of the birth of his symbol "the grassblossom," which in fact is a myth:

When they arrived, they saw
that was true, the naked blue
blossom on the grass-weed
was trembling in the cold wind
of the misty morning, and
the delivery-room of the garden
was filled with dust and
powder of coal.

The expressions "naked blue blossom," "cold wind of the misty morning," and "delivery-room of the garden" do not heighten the quality of perception; they are there merely to qualify the environment. They are inert in imagistic terms. Their function has been entrusted to the idea itself, pictorial support being only an environmental reality.

In *Aara Drushya* (*The Other View*, 1981) Mahapatra returns to mythical-constructs, but as a changed person. He realizes that the use of myth as a metaphor is more effective when the point of contact is automatic, and that the binary of collective and personal memory is unusable unless the quotidian is overtaken by the transcendent. So, he picks up Yashoda's confounding experience with the child Krishna's "viswarupa" as the vehicle for conveying the idea that love for the earth carries with it the penalty of burying the great vision of life in death. The secret of "the other view" thus becomes Yashoda's personal experience brought to the modern readers as part of their collective memory. Similarly, "Srikrishnanka Mrityu" ("Death of Krishna"), intertextually connected to "Jara Shabarar Sangeet" ("The Song of Jara"), sounds much less plaintive, as the anguish of Jara the hunter transforms into a mocking indifference to the great event. The sharp edge of satire is kept cleverly blunted with the use of pre-designed idea-constructs, not surprisingly, considering that satire and self-mockery are not the principal weapons in Mahapatra's armory. Compassion serves as his principal weapon, and he uses it to defend the mortal failings of weaker souls, even his own. This is romantic imagination.

Samayara Shesha Nama (*The Ultimate Name of Time*, 1984), *Kahaku Puchhiba Kuha* (*Say, Whom to Ask*, 1986) and *Chadheire Tu Ki Janu* (*What Would You Know, O Bird*, 1990) constitute a trilogy of "return to roots." Not that Mahapatra has ever forgotten his roots, but understandably his quest for an idea had taken him away to a distant land, the collective past or the contemporary predicament of the universal man. With *Samayara Shesha Nama* he returns home, to his grandmother, to his children, to his habitat and generally into a host of intimate relationships. It is here that collective memory is overtaken by personal memory and the binary is broken. In "For My Little Son, Munu" he writes:

> I know that you are
> my ace trooper
> in the unending war
> against darkness, against emptiness.
> And someday,
> when your general falls in the fight
> do not surrender
> nor ask for peace.
> (*RT* 10)

Nor does the poet ever surrender; rather he holds his own against a vicious world, and he finds a place, the overcast sky of a *Varsa Sakal* (*Rainy Morning*, 1993), to hide his soul. The idea-constructs slowly disappear in the mist of metaphysical lyricism. Mahapatra owes this lyricism to the three great poets of Orissa: Sarala Das, Jagannath Das, and Bhima Bhoi. As a synthesizer of three principal idioms of Oriya Poetry, Mahapatra bridges two major gaps in the chronology of poetic utterances. He links Oriya poetry with the grand tradition, lays anchor in the safety of his contemporary haven, and in the process brings the contemporary close to the modern. The metaphysical lyrics of the latest phase of his poetry symbolize this bridging of distances that existed so long. In making his poetic utterances, as the Swedish commentator Olls Malmgren says, "a confluence of the Sanskrit religious-mythical tradition, the European lyrical modernism and the folk-poetry of his

home province Orissa's sun-drenched villages," Mahapatra gives an entirely new ethos and meaning to modern Indian poetry, and a poetic culture that mixes sublimity and concreteness in equal measure."

T. R. JOY

A SPELL OF INTIMATE LANDSCAPES: THE POETRY OF PRABHANJAN K. MISHRA

I

M. T. Vasudevan Nair, the prominent fiction writer in Malayalam literature, in his acceptance speech at the 1996 Gyanpeet Award Ceremony had this to say about his work: "The background for most of my works is my own village. The village river is my literary bloodstream. The village as a whole gave me sounds, images and words. As in the case of a village, the change of seasons in human condition also attracts me" (*Kalakaumudi* 1074: 24). By specifying the source and range of his fictional raw materials, M. T. Vasudevan Nair is hinting at the nature and range of the fictional world he has achieved in his works. Every major literary writer creates a fictional world. This fictional or poetic world and the world-view that informs it can become the touchstone for the assessment of the worth of anybody's work. The authenticity of such a world would depend on the creativity with which he has woven his themes, images, characters, and events into a comprehensive and cohesive whole. It is the strength and/or variety of such a fictional world and its vision that lends artistic credibility to the poetic voice.

Prabhanjan K. Mishra is one of such artistically credible new voices in Indian English poetry. In 1993 he published his first book of poems, *Vigil*. His second, *Lips of a Canyon*, was brought out in 2000. Recently his Oriya poems have received much critical acclaim and popularity in his home state. A Deputy Commissioner, Central Excise, Bombay, Mr. Mishra was born and brought up in a village in Orissa. He obtained his M.Sc. in Physics at the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, where Jayanta Mahapatra, the Indian English poet, was his teacher. He has been widely published in journals, magazines and anthologies.

In this study I will focus on his first book, *Vigil*, in which he has successfully created a poetic world with its own valid perspectives. His use of images, themes, tones, characters and situations in the poems are charged with a truly poetic consciousness. His is a world of basic emotions that excite, confuse and complicate interpersonal relationships, mostly of a sexual kind. Here "His smile / ripples in the wind / and ruffles her reasoning" (*Vigil* 19). The excitement, confusion and complication in this world arise out of the psychological moves and counter-moves--conscious as well as unconscious--that the protagonist and the antagonists of Mishra's poems engage in. This chess game of personal relationships almost always is motivated and / or maintained by human sexuality. Sex and sexuality, love and intimacy are the issues that bother Mishra's world. Although these are perennial concerns in literature, the novelty of Mishra's treatment comes from "the wide variety of personally challenging situations and moods…the range of perspectives and complex emotions succinctly constituted through arresting, freshly compacted images," as John Oliver Perry (*Kavya Bharati* 6: 65) suggests.

II

Vigil has sixty-one poems spread over five sections. The almost obsessive focus on man-woman relationship that is typical of Mishra is more evident in the last three sections, which include forty-two poems of the volume.

> She was another date at week-ends.
> Good at chess, I masked my moves
> in seeming sacrifices,
> false starts, forgetfulness--
> pretences, ruses,
> the innocently cloaked daggers.

A few nightcaps in my pad and
occasional tea at her place later
she was willing to swim
and I, the greedy diver,
forced the oyster. (57)

This is how the poem, "A Game of Dice," begins in the fourth section of the book, *The White Hush*. Quite obviously, this poem sets the pattern of a chess player's strategy that the poet uses to portray his world of human relationships.

The "I" is almost always a male persona, even in other poems. The opponent is often a female-wife, a girl friend, secret lover, daughter, mother, call girl and/or some archetypal femme fatale. Sometimes the persona encounters complex and ironic emotional predicaments where he has to deal with more than one of his female opponents. In the poem, "The Rubicon," from the third section, he is shocked by the "knock" of his secret-lover when

My wife sighs,
absorbing the silent kicks
of our precious foetus in her womb…. (39)

The imagistic strategy in and the tonal treatment of the poem expand the horizon of the tangled web of human relationships and the inevitable guilt that shatters the hope of an ultimate victory. This point will be clearer when we look at some of the following expressions from the poem:

My hands fumble at the door-knob….
Could it be only
an allusive wind?
A distant wood-pecker?
Or, a morse of my heart? (39)

The allusive power of his expressions extends the range of his dominant imagery, the imagery of moves and countermoves of a domestic chessmaster-husband into the regions of wider conflicts.

> We yoked the wind
> to reap waves,
> but beached in this house
> of antiques, you gather dust:
> a bejewelled icon.
> I sulk, a miserly bidder.
> ("Grasshoppers Dance" 40)

Occasions of outdoor imagery in depicting human relationship evoke a metaphorical space for Mishra's psychological and sexual world.

> Tonight we will….
> retrace the lines of our palms.
> These, like rivers fed by their tributaries,
> have swelled into shallow thalwegs.
>
> Every night we scrape our innards
> to give the magma outlets.
> Tides choke in debris,
> the intimacy having receded to far beaches.
> In orgastic rituals our self-seeking vitals
> join and explode. ("Tonight[2]" 45)

Even in a situation of rare harmony and love the sense of anxiety about an unseen foe that may suddenly checkmate him is amazingly fresh. In the course of a visit to Konark, he presents us with this scene:

> Tonight we put our souls
> to sculpt the legend again
> out of the dark's flesh,

attune our desires
to the bodies' waves and stones
and plant a seed lovingly….
(“Konark by Night” 42)

A sculptor's delicate and clever moves that dominate the scene approximate very closely those of a chessmaster. It is as if they sense a schemer in the images of “the dark's flesh” and “the bodies' waves and stones.”

In Mishra, sexual encounters often defeat the partners; they don't seem to achieve meaningful self-realization. They remain at the level of hollow pretence, “the make-believe / the props, pretences, and sophistry,” which, in fact, point to the psychology of sexuality. At the same time, the power and control sexuality has over the persona is strikingly brought out by mixing complex strands of imagery in his poem “The Wound”:

then the wound demands food.

Its hunger is whetted as it gorges
on my blood, flesh and bones,
I offer as a samurai and hope
that the flame would die
devouring the oil in the lamp.
But it lives like the genie
bottled up, casting a shadow
about me. A snare. (49)

The title image in the poem, “The Snake,” is admirably developed to symbolize the incestuous undercurrents and sublimations in the apparently innocent interactions in a family.

My mother worships it and my wife
admires it from a distance.
Both claim that it visits their dreams.

It fascinates my daughter.
She wishes to touch
its gloss and shine
but apprehensions hold her back.

I hate its overtures
in my household. (50)

A different aspect of sexual perspective that Prabhanjan Mishra lays hands on is also evident here. The very emotion or the force of sex itself becomes his opponent in the course of his attempts to negotiate around this messy reality.

All these years I have measured
my steps lest I intrude
on its lethal ruse. (50)

Besides intensifying the overall image of the war of chess, the manoeuvres behind the poem, "The Closed Door," reveal the sad irony of players themselves turning victims of their game; the game has already become pointless, simply addictive:

We will move our pawns,
weave attacks and defences,
knowing that the strategies
have lost their purposes,
with nostalgia and hope. (51)

The way in which Mishra layers and makes dense the metaphoric texture of his poetry demonstrates his masterly and creative touch. In the poem, "The Snake," the title symbolizes sexuality; the whole action in the poem is apt for a snake. At the same time, this symbol in the course of the poem takes a consciousness that befits a menacing enemy with an intention to hurt. A similar multi-layered imagery is created to clarify yet another shade of man-woman situation in the poem, "Boomerang."

The surface image is of fishing, which leads to a series of manoeuvres that allude to the chess motif again.

> Deep down the silt of hurt
> it sinks slowly. Your eyes
> go myopic. Forehead, pleated ice. (56)

The imagery becomes surprisingly more complex in the next stanza:

> Every crescent moon, sharp
> and crisp. You throw at him.
> It glances off his skin and returns.

An example of similar strategy is seen in the poem, "The Closed Door":

> To my knock you will open the door
> and reveal lips grotesque with age,
> twisted dry-fish for toes,
> breasts: pocketfuls of peanuts.
>
> A relentless sphinx
> will be sitting in the crow-feet of your face…. (51)

So the range of multi-layered images used in his poems embraces a wider and intricate spectrum within and around the over-riding motif of a chess game. John Oliver Perry's observation about Mishra's poetry proves pertinent here: "The diction is rarely flat and conventional, often dazzlingly evocative, dense, extensive, pushing passionately along to expand our comprehension of both human relationships and the possibilities of poetry" (*KB* 6: 65).

In the context of man-woman relationship, the gender bias in and the feminist analysis of the book are quite fitting. Titles like "Meet the Amazon," "The Feminist," "Ricochet," "The Phallic

God" and "Male Repentant Pig (MRP)" themselves call attention to that kind of possibility. Mishra's persona would seem to justify his victimisation at the hands of the women he encounters. He may sound complaining about the vicious ways of the femme fatales in his life.

> I haven't met the Amazon
> but sail faster rapids.
> Piranhas of lips.
> ("Meet the Amazon" 60)

> From her navel
> uncoils a snake,
> constricting men
> in death embrace.
> ("Whore" 58)

He comes out blunt and bold against the vulgarization of feminism through an unrealistic macho mania.

> Why must your logo
> be a vulgar sword?
> Can't you be soft and yielding
> except as Christ on the scaffolding?
> ("The Macho Mania" 61)

At the same time, he doesn't excuse male chauvinism. His deliberate satire against such male pose in the poem, "Male Repentant Pig," shows that he is not one-sided in his gender perspective. More than proving a point against or for either sex, Mishra's poems engage us with the varied moods and movements of the complex psychological and emotional processes and exigencies of the world of the interpersonal and the sexual. Despite lines like "My life / an armful of breasts / spilling without pretext" ("Meet the Amazon" 60), there is no trivialization of the interpersonal in the work.

The basic and archetypal nature of the man-woman relationship in human history is at the center of the poem, "Siva."

> By instinct she straddles him.
> In defeat he cringes between his teeth.
> His claws drip with the blood of greed.
>
> …Among zodiacs she draws her lines,
> her boat drifts from stars to star.
> After aeons she catches the culprit,
> doesn't kill him to destroy the balance sheet.
> She rides him, lashes him to walk and trot.
> He stands shrinking from a man to a pigmy
> wiping his hands on pages of history. (69)

Mishra can capture the nuances of a disturbed relationship between a mother and her illegitimate son.

> Say maa, whose silhouette
> escapes in the sandstorm?
>
> …The evidences and witnesses
> grow indistinct : history, a wisp;
> our links turn into handcuffs
> and love into a padlock.
> ("A Bastard's Lament" 71)

As I have mentioned earlier, the images of an interpersonal worldview abound in the last three sections of the book. The other two are "Writings on the Wall" and "The Concrete Trojan." The latter is a section of city poems, nine in all, based on the experience of living in Bombay. Even here, Mishra's view of the interpersonal sexuality and intimacy provides the figurative framework to evolve a poetic perspective of the Bombay experience. The city is personified as a female who "waylays all / with sips of her magic potion, / laughs / at their bleating impotence," in the poem, "The

City of No Seasons" (27). In other poems of the section, half a dozen of those sharp and realistic location-shots in Bombay, Mishra does not fail to focus on the sexual as if to prove his unique outlook on poetry and life.

> Stealthily I glance
> at the sweating pits of the foreign woman.
> ("Elephanta" 30)

> Even the most orthodox bosoms
> relax and loll on this beach….
> The evening
> waitresses to nubile lovers.
> ("Chowpatty Beach" 34)

> The tired prostitute yawns; hers is
> a bargain floor, not a fashion boutique.
> ("In the Hellhole of Dharavi" 36)

The first section of *Vigil*, true to its title, "Writings on the Walls," collects ten of Mishra's poems dealing mostly with other social and political issues. This is as if to establish his sensibility towards the problems that lie beside and beyond his poetic specialization. If he comes out as a Bombayite in his poems on Bombay, the first section reveals him as a responsive citizen intensely aware and critical of our country's socio-political scenario. The poet-persona takes the side of the powerless ordinary people from different walks of life. Here he is indeed a poet of the weak and the marginalised.

> The thoughts of food
> nakedly mushroom
> in our blood.
> Crumbs of rice-cake
> rule our destiny.
> ("Bread is not Made of Dreams" 13)

"Peasants of Orissa" and "In Orissa" are two poems of empathy for the very poor. But his empathy does not forget to grant them their dignity of self-awareness and of the knowledge of the brutal reality they are forced into.

> Scrawny men pull rickshaws
> on rickety roads.
> Their laboured breaths
> grunt in empty stomachs,
> the tired legs weep for reprieve,
> but their taciturn backs know
> that bread comes from crushed bones.
> ("In Orissa" 22)

One thing comes out clearly that justifies Mishra's overall worldview of the intimate, the sexual and the interpersonal here. He picks up mostly the downtrodden, and handles their individual plights in a quiet and personal way. The understanding of the violent and often senseless political activism of radical dissent persuades Mishra to stroll quietly with a bereaved mother and in full empathy talk to her soul whose "sleep has been the colour of fire" since "her sons joined the ranks" ("Writings on the Wall" 14).

Sexual is the imagery that Mishra uses to criticize, again in his usual reflective tone, the custom of early and forced marriages.

> Sita Kaur braces her body
> to receive the marital thunder.
> The live snake, consecrated,
> gift-wrapped, is left on her lap
>
> by her loving father.
> Its coils give her goose-bumps.
> ("Three Old Fairy Tales" 16)

The lonely plight of widowed "old father," and the problem of generation gap also have their own sexual perspective for Mishra in the poem, "The Divide."

> On the old gramophone
> Ghalib's sloppy ghazzals
> cobweb in catacombs
> of celibate lovers
> pining for shadows. (18)

The persona's confrontation of the colonial plunder takes the form of a poetic and personal conversation with a foreigner, in his poem, "The Foreign Tourist." True to Dr. Vilas Sarang's remark, "Mishra speaks softly with a quiet confidence." His is not the voice of a loud political propagandist or of a bold committed prophet from the Mountain.

He confronts one of the common types of our politicians, exposing him in a subtle way, not loudly challenging him. Here again, he uses the device of sexual associations and images.

> He wears a tiny cross,
> a Hindu by caste-marks.
> ….
> One eye guards his groceries,
> several cartons stacked against a wall.
> The other excels the man himself.
> Simultaneously it looks for
> a vacant seat, ogles the young woman
> suckling her baby, and examines
> the peanuts before eating.
> ("The Politician" 23)

III

Prabhanjan K. Mishra hasn't employed traditional strict forms of versification with their respective line-structure, metre and rhyme schemes. His mode throughout this volume is that of free verse. Most of his poems do not go beyond one single printed page. Still Mishra succeeds in bringing out a valid poetic world and vision through other relevant poetic devices and a credible artistic consciousness.

Because he is a high-ranking official in the Indian Revenue Service, he understands the social and political affairs of the country, and has written a few poems on such issues. But the overall poetic preference and specialisation in his *Vigil* stays with the world of the psychological and the interpersonal. He reveals the nuances of varied emotional encounters and their immense inner horizon of possibilities with justifiable poetic creativity and talent. The personal voices of his characters talking to themselves, and/or to their companions in the privacy of their hearts, evoke the introverted and reflective tone and atmosphere of the book. In his poems we generally overhear the voices; we are never directly addressed as an audience.

So Mishra's poetic voice and perspective can be insightful, fascinating and, many a time, disturbing. John Oliver Perry is more emphatic in his appreciation of *Vigil*: "After putting a very few … reservations aside, these poems comprise as impressive a total accomplishment as anything written today, whether by older or younger poets, whether in India or abroad" (*KB* 6: 66). And that is no mean compliment indeed.

CHITTARANJAN MISRA

THE POETRY OF BIBHU PADHI: A CRITIQUE

Though Bibhu Padhi has been writing poetry since 1975 and has been widely published in India and abroad, his first collection, *Going to the Temple*, came out only in 1988. Since then, his poems have reached more and more readers through three more collections. Any single poem chosen at random no doubt provides sufficient material for being left with the impact of the sensibility of the poet, but a collection of poems offers more scope for a critical reading and better understanding. The collections hint at the sequence of development of Padhi's art, thus foregrounding the clues for a diachronic study. Padhi's collections have been reviewed by distinguished poets and critics, but a consistent analysis of his overall output has been ignored. Scholars seem to quote lines from the texts of Padhi or Paranjape to illustrate a point while writing papers or dissertations on poets generally included in *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, edited by A.K.Mehrotra, or *Ten Twentieth Century Indian poets*, edited by R.Parthasarathy. This attitude speaks of a general consumeristic culture in a society where the consumer's preference tends towards the more standardized, the more advertised products. The critic too goes for "safe" books and prefers to keep controversy at bay. In the process, poets with original contributions remain peripheral to the mainstream discussions and evaluations. The repeatedly included poems in "mimic anthologies" cannot be the index of the unusually significant voices in the making of Indian Poetry in English for the last four decades, like that of Padhi, although his work has been included in American and British anthologies.

There is no "exile and return" theme in Padhi's poems. There is no strain at tugging the rein of the bundle of traditions left in India while trying to comfort one's being in an alien place. Padhi is rooted in his soil, is at ease with the medium, however "foreign" that might be. He does not try to consciously build his culture, but culture shapes his concerns. He uses English words outside the

boundary of English society. He does not nourish the notion of a foreign or illusory audience. That is the reason why he is capable of transcending territorial, ethnic and political limitations in order to come to terms with the larger issues of life. His vision abstracts and personalizes the essence of issues, however culture-specific and local they may be. Lack of expatriate experience allows poets like Padhi to be more universal and multi-directional. Romantically the creative self migrates into domains of varieties of life, here and elsewhere.

In his *A Wound Elsewhere* (1992), a sense of loss looms large around the images. But the images are selected from varied cultural spaces. Yet they basically signify the universal themes of death and despair, loss and regeneration. While making a comparative analysis of this collection with *Songs of Despair* by Daud Haider, in a review article, Sachidananda Mohanty observes: "The treatment of death, however, is far from uniform. The poem "Rest," for instance, narrates the newspaper report of the aged Danish father being frozen alive in snow in the act of providing warmth to his baby daughter. The season's ultimate snow guarantees the journey's end. But has this death been of any consequence? Does not this prosaic event uncover the perennial truth of sacrificial love?"

A snow-bed for a dead father and his small daughter in "Rest" or "the bare bamboo bed" to carry a dead body in "Grandmother" in the same volume speaks of the simple and uniform nature of death itself, irrespective of spatial difference and varied cultural contexts. In the midst of having everything one discovers a feeling of something lacking, and before that something is really located in space and time the feeling gets magnified to a sense of poverty, of isolation whose epicenter is always "elsewhere." It is like a wound elsewhere whose pain is here, on this body, in this mind. The title poem of this collection (Padhi's second) highlights this allusive spot of the mind that is sensitive to suffering and the source of suffering. There is a persuasive refrain stylized by the Vedantic

"Neti" logic: "Not here, not here, not this, not here" (72). Questions crop up around the reality of being 'hurt', only to remain unanswered. The answers: "no one knows, no one need know" (73). The reader and the poet do not know the address of the "other place" where "words are afraid to go". The same line "No one knows, no one need know" concludes the poem "Among the Ruins," which describes a helpless groping for an answer to questions like "what else is left here?"

> What else is left here….
> Except lips that cannot move and eyes
> that cannot smile? Proud, forbidding shadows
> playing among the last of the pillars,
> arches, family albums, doors and windows
> that never open? No one knows;
> no one need know. (46)

In his first collection, *Going to the Temple* (1988), questions were more in number than they are in the second. "Questions are asked / and are never answered" ("Konarka" 45). The emphasis was on the tension, the subtle disturbances that are aroused through a pattern of interrogative utterances. The unexplored areas of mind are probed in terms of feeling and the realistic commonplace things gather different meanings and enter into another logic. Often they hurt at death:

> What are these figures
> emerging from within
> the murky distance
> of the night?
> What do their shoulders carry?
> ("Night Watch" 18-19)

This first collection contains a few love poems but the other poems correspond to a varied body of situations and responses. Open to boundless contexts and analyses, the first collection

introduces the readers to the power and possibilities of a poet, representative of the newly found freedom of the new generation of Indian poets writing in English after Nissim Ezekiel.

With the publication of his first volume of poetry, Bibhu Padhi had emerged as a poet eluding all labels but working with experiences beyond the frontiers of cultural codification and inhibition. The titles and the themes of the poems like "Indian Evening," "All through the Long Night," "Night watch," and "Sunrise at Puri-on-Sea" suggest how the poet is awake and sensitive to permanent forms of nature rather than to the banal immediacies of his contemporary society. Romantic and philosophical like the poets of his time writing in regional languages, Padhi owns a language other than his mother tongue. Maybe that is the reason for which he repeatedly uses the word "Indian" while depicting "Indian Evening" (14), or "Indian Afternoons" in "Pigeons" (17) and in "Loss" (24), instead of writing only 'evening' or 'afternoon'. The evenings and afternoons in India are different from those in Europe or North America. But when he talks about 'winter' he does not think of suggesting an 'Indian' winter. Metaphorically, winter is more or less the same everywhere:

> Winter is warm sleep with our small wives
> and our loving but speechless children.
> Grandmother, don't leave us during winter.
> ("Grandmother: A Request" 49)

> I hear a voice calling me
> from a far-off season--
> familiar and old, like your touch,
> possessive as winter.
> ("The Storm" 57)

Padhi writes on summer and rain too but he seems to have been more affected by summer. His "Five Summer Poems" in his

first book are a subtle excursion into the interior of the self through phases of torment constructed through the heat of a tropical sun. The locales like New Delhi and Cuttack are correlatives of a persuasion that prepares for a "gesture of surrender" where "the heart opens" and a "dream opens."

His third book, entitled *Lines from a Legend*, came out in England, in 1993. The first poem of this collection too starts with summer. But the heart does not open; "The heart hides behind every / casual knock at the door, / waits for enduring visitants" ("Summer Vacation" 9). In yet another poem on summer, there is acceptance and awareness of nature:

> As the summer wind sails over my body,
> it makes me its own.
> ("Summer Evening in Cuttack" 12)

With the publication of this third collection one witnesses the maturing of the poet's style and his gradual shift from the youngish vision of the world to a more reflective and meditative kind of verse.

The subtle handling of the key images in each poem shows the ingenuity of the poet in *Lines from a Legend*. The images are not concrete visual images, carrying the commonplace ideas associated with them. But this collection is all abstract, the images are more open-ended, while the meanings are played through the images. The titles of the poems refer to processes of thought and action, expressive of the reminiscence of groping into a future which is more prognostic than cheerful. "Looking for Things," for example, is a poem of this kind. The whole poem deconstructs the poetic process of reaching at a conclusion through visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactile images. The first stanza begins with 'eyes' and the visuals of a thought process merge into the invisible: "The eye may not go further". In the next stanza "the ears take over, but it seems / there's no sound left they hadn't heard before."

The visual images of men and women walking away towards the ancient river, like ghosts, are quite arbitrary. The questions regarding the identity of the people and the location of the river and their purpose of walking are linked through a casual coherence: "Everything else dissolves / in the night." Similarly, the ears are accustomed to official language related to policies of the government like direct taxes, land holdings, power-cuts, military activities along the borders, to quarrels over property issues between brothers, or to the gasping for breath of a retired constable playing 'kabbadi' with his grandsons in spite of asthma or age. The ears are looking for voices other than all these. I quote the last stanza in its entirety:

> The unyielding smell of cooking of salted
> sunbaked fish pervades the air I breathe.
> I turn about in my half-sleep, recover
> and turn around to locate which other
> mortal things a touch can discover, play with,
> what other stupid means are still left to feel
> the soul's secure, untouched immortality.
> (11)

Smells, tastes and touches are inadequate, limited. What is the poet up to, stretching the functions of the senses to their extreme? To feel the untouched immortality of the soul? Is not the 'immortality of the soul' unreachable? I think one becomes aware of the irony at work at the end of the poem. Whether the horror and emptiness of modern life are magnified, or the philosophy of renunciation is chosen as an alternative in the poem cannot be conclusively answered. The beauty of the stanza rests in the linkage of the images and the intriguing puzzle it offers in its entirety.

The dominant images in the whole book are images of darkness, however. At least forty such instances can be cited from the forty-five poems in the book, which are connected with

darkness as a metaphor for death, departure, defeat, and even common loss. It may be a dark indifferent sleep or a sheltering shade or the dark of the night into which everything dissolves. Darkness navigates through a night's loneliness where a map of stars signifies isolated hours of a darker life. Visuals of the night pervade the poems. The night either fades with yesterday's memory or falls as darkness over an entire town. The titles of poems like "All Through the Long Night," "The Night of the Waters," "Now Darkness is Falling," "Growing up in the Dark," "Living in the Dark," and "The Dreams at Midnight," present varied pictures of the dark. The treatment of images of darkness as mysterious is very effective in the poem "The Disembodied Hand." Often the presence of the dead father and grandmother punctuates the intensity of the darker dimensions of nights and related obsessions. In "Among the Ruins" he discovers how "the darkness encloses / every stone and leaf / (that) corrupts the power of speech". In the title poem, "Lines from a Legend," the night-lotus blooms under the moon's benevolence, where "the dead have lit their own dark faces." The poet's search for lotus in the absence of the sun can be possible only in the world of legend and myth, and it is legend that Padhi seems to see everywhere.

There are references to poets and friends inside the texts of the poems and in the dedications. The elite audience can understand and enjoy these poems better as they are associated with persons like Philip Larkin, Vinod Sen, James Lauglin, Jayanta Mahapatra, and Bibek Jena. The fourth and latest book, entitled *Painting the House* (1999) also contains poems dedicated to William Strafford, William Golding, Keith Sagar, Shababa Azmi, Andrei Tarkovsky and Raymond Carver. The perspective of such referents may inspire a scholar of culture-studies or historicism, but even without these names the poems are not harmed.

With *Painting the House*, the reader confronts certain themes and references that come as a continuance through all the previous collections. The visuals of summer afternoons, the ruins of the sun

temple of Konark, the memories of the dream town Cuttack are reconstructed and revised, and the connections are retraced. What emerges as the persistent theme common to all the four books is a feeling that the self belongs to another place and another time, even though one inhabits a place which is identifiable, actual and culturally as well as socially well situated. The feeling of being "elsewhere" while living in the midst of the here and now interrelates the divergent immediate issues against a broad diachronic frame. "Poem for My Son," for instance, creates a mysterious aura around the sleeping child in the quiet of the night. The father feels a remoteness, an undefinable space between himself and the child even though the mother, the father and the child are on the same bed. The owl's late cry alerts the father to the finality of nights:

> I seem to hear a faraway whisper
> that almost tells me
> you're not mine (4)

In a recent interview, when Padhi was asked "What kind of themes have had the maximum impact on your poems?" he answered:

> When I wrote my first 'serious' poem, 'From the Extra Medical Ward'--that was in 1995--the theme was death and how it affected my youngish vision of the world. Other themes have followed. Personal relationships, ancestral friendships, my own cultural identity, birds, beasts, the feeling of depression, isolation and poverty in the midst of having almost everything…materially speaking.

In fact, the themes are based on the time, place and ethos of our time. But in their rendering, a sense of crisis (cultural, political, ideological) faced by the world today becomes fused with a

distinctly developed style of Padhi's own. His style is reminiscent of A.K. Ramanujan, and his rhythms and themes are as appealing as those of Jayanta Mahapatra. Traditional and humanistic in approach, Padhi seems to have discovered the 'mytheme,' the 'universal' of histories and cultures.

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JOHN OLIVER PERRY

AIMING AT A COLLECTIVE LITERARY HISTORY

Mehrotra, Arvind K., ed. *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English.* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. pp.xxii, 406. Rs.1495.

Given Prema Nandakumar's concerns in the last *KB* about my taking exception (in *Chandrabhaga 2/2000*) to Makarand Paranjape's attempt in the same journal to judge Indian English verse from the 19th century to the present by overtly nationalistic criteria, I must apparently state equally overtly my own critical stance vis a vis contemporary Indian literary endeavours. Most profoundly and actively, as a practical or, Makarand might say, merely pragmatic critic, I am committed to stimulating productive encounters among critics within India in order to minimize the impact of often irrelevant theories and practices developed abroad without concern for the particular social and cultural issues India faces today. That commitment was made quite explicit ten years ago in my *Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism* (Sterling, 1992), which focussed on how both the distancing (with consequent irrelevance) and the lack of concretely appropriate critical authorities have constrained contemporary Indian English criticism both theoretically and institutionally. This commitment has been further demonstrated in a couple of recent essays (e.g., "Encountering in Indian Criticism," *Indian Literature*, 194, Nov.-Dec. 1999: 223-228) and especially in my helping my old friend and combatant Makarand himself and a new virtual (i.e., email only) friend, Dr. S. Sreenivasan, editor of the *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, to organize a survey of the practices and opinions of presently active Indian critics writing in all languages and employing any (or even professedly no) critical discipline, including foreign-devised ones. (Please see the invitation and announcement elsewhere in this journal.) So, I am grateful that Nandakumar "encountered" my criticism and gave me this

opportunity to explain my socially pragmatic agenda, which informs the following review.

What expectations have been expressed, and what would be appropriate ones for *An Illustrated History of Indian English Literature*, edited by IE poet and critic Arvind Krishna Mehrotra? Two headlines from the *Sunday Express* for reviews a month apart indicate the contrariety of two standard popular opinions, really about the literature more than this history of it: "At home in India too" and "A faux-history of a fledgling tradition." Sparring still with Makarand about Indian nationalism in (of) literature, our major theoretical or ideological difference, I want to object to his desire (expressed in a very brief negative notice in *India Today*, September 30, 2002) to see in this book a "clear answer" to the question "What is Indian English literature?" More particularly, I believe it infeasible and, indeed, pernicious (to use Makarand's word attacking Mehrotra's book) to expect any complex, multipronged historiographic effort to be "convincing … as 'Indian'," whatever constructed political, social and/or cultural entity that contested term might indicate. To be explicit again, that criterion, implicitly invoking "true Indian-ness," is pernicious because it gives support, qualified and intentional or not, to the forces of Hindu nationalism (the ideology of Hindutva and its Sangh Parivar proponents, RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and BJP). But these same exclusionary forces are found, in a "soft" form, even in certain Congress' activities and in more overstated forms in other socio-political, often caste-based movements. All these politically exaggerated, implicitly exclusionary ethnic biases are presently destroying the multicultural fabric of the Indian nation-state and its diverse, often discordant and contentious social constituents, all too susceptible, as who can nowadays doubt, to narrowly partisan political manipulation and extremely violent expressions. Differences need, no doubt, to be celebrated, and opposing positions clearly enunciated, but the aim within a democratically oriented society is to understand and where necessary negotiate these differences, not to express them at the expense of others.

Nationalist and other ethnic issues being one specific criterion not acceptable--at least, to me as a non-Indian who enjoys, respects and latterly has built an intellectual life on various India matters, mostly literary--then what criteria are preferable for a critical history? Well, most of all, as I have indicated, not those based on any single, "clear" and unequivocal notion of either history or India or, indeed, literature. What this means is that any attempt to survey Indian English literature from its origins to the present should be multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional and open to multiple points of view and interpretations, not only by contributors but also by readers. In short, it should be an historiographic book for its time, the twenty-first century. This era may not herald, after all, the end of history through the culturally homogenizing processes that threaten to accompany what have so far been humanly, socially, nationally and internationally irresistible globalizations of economies and their key agents and components. But whatever the future holds, certainly the global intellectual milieu within which each of us strives to be ourselves is deeply impressed with certain ideas of the recent past, particularly the twentieth-century's increasing and often inflated awareness of the relativity of historiography. Recognizing in theory how unavoidable are our ideological and other cultural assumptions should, however, set in motion a further and consequent responsibility not only to recognize these biases but also to minimize their impact in order liberally and as democratically as possible to encompass the breadth and depth of alternative perspectives. Though value judgments are crucial to criticism, hierarchies are not.

As for one dimension of this desirable openness to varied interpretations and inputs, I will agree with Makarand's closing comment that "the book is certainly 'illustrated'--so brilliantly, in fact, that that alone would make it worth possessing," even at the price of Rs. 1495 for xxii plus 406 extra large (7.25" x 9.25") pages. What is more, the list of illustrations takes eleven of those xxii pages because brief paragraphs often explain the character, setting, personages, historical background, provenance, etc., of particular, often rare, illustrations. Every picture, of course, also entails its

individual perspective(s), but the variety of styles of sketches, paintings, caricatures, and photos (all, of course, reduced to grey tones) testifies to the generously encompassing aims of this handsomely produced volume. Though the page size might readily accommodate a close-packed double-column format, the editor (with his relatively new publisher, Permanent Black, aided by Ravi Dayal and Orient Longman) has determined to use long lines of 12 point type sufficiently widely spaced to make reading physically easy, even at the cost of wider "coverage" or lower printing costs. It simply would not be possible, therefore, to produce a "popular" version of this book, and anyway, its high production values clearly signal this hefty volume's primary audience (besides every respectable Indian or foreign school, college, university and English department library): the more affluent English-using, consumption-oriented Indian middle-class. It is this growing class which has made commercially viable the wide publication of present-day IE writers, diasporic and otherwise, who get a sizable share of attention here: of the twenty-four chapters or essays, four are confined more or less exclusively to their work and parts of three omnibus essays deal with other presently active writers. "Written by specialists … for the non-specialist reader" there are no footnotes and less than seven pages of suggested "further reading" organized chapter by chapter, so this is definitely not an in-depth reference book, despite its "encyclopaedic arrangement which eschews both continuity and closure." Note carefully that last caveat: Mehrotra understands that Indian English literature (whatever the shifting functions of its language) "has come about through a process of accretion…. piecemeal and ragged, or like a fresh start each time." At least until recent times, when some distinctive modes of especially fiction writing obviously have developed some continuities, as are well noted, *seriatim*.

The above indications of implicit perspective aside, there can be no question that the editorial process strove for the widest possible compass. Indeed, Mehrotra's three-page preface further and sadly informs us that four more commissioned chapters failed to be submitted on time--those on Ananda Coomaraswamy, the art

historian (who, by the way, built the fine Asian collection at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts), on "The Pulp Artists" and "The Historian as Author" as well as "a discussion of periodicals, journals and little magazines." So "literature" certainly has a wide open meaning in this collection, where not only Nehru's historical writing gets attention, in a chapter the premier shares with Gandhi and which, quite naturally details, as do several other chapters (contrary to Makarand's impression), how nation-building depended on, worked with and moderated inevitable distortions from "the oppressor's tongue." But also a surprising array of other writers, native and not, well-known and obscure, pro- and anti-colonial, nationalistic and supra- or internationalist are enrolled as literary, even "Five Nature Writers: Jim Corbett, Kenneth Anderson, Salim Ali, Kailash Sankhala, and M. Krishnan" (four unknown to me). Given such comprehensiveness, I am grateful that we were not treated to an exposition of five "unnatural" writers, i.e., mystics, who to me remain incomprehensible! Though I insist that concerns for the spiritual in humanity need not be either mystical or theistic, nor even metaphysical, much less institutional or religious, I felt the essay on Aurobindo to be quite sufficient for writing about determinedly private transcendences, along with various indications elsewhere of whatever mystical elements survive in other noted writers like Tagore.

Whole chapters are devoted to five Diasporans: Rudyard Kipling, Verrier Elwin (an anthropological writer unknown to me but made intensely interesting by Ramachandra Guha's deeply informed overview), V. S. Naipaul (of course, but mainly for his India-focussed works, not merely as a thoroughly globalized Nobelist!), A. K. Ramanujan (given an expansive, utterly sympathetic essay by Mehrotra himself, who also wrote a usefully suggestive "Introduction," analyzing crucial historical movements and present-day issues), and Salman Rushdie, of course; but then need he be credited with "putting the subcontinent on the literary map" or showing Indian writers "how to be post-colonial"? Unfortunately, in my opinion, another whole chapter goes to the admittedly inferior English writings of that other Nobelist, Tagore,

the wide influence of whose total work has never been carefully traced. Besides other essayists often dealing with Diasporans in omnibus or compendium chapters (most extensively in Jon Mee's "After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s," which also considers Rushdie to be "the messiah" for those who, frequently living abroad, achieved glamorous global literary success after him --so because of him), there is Sudesh Mishra's specially commissioned "From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora." This essay treats some of the old sort, descendants of the indentured laborers or "girmit" (girmitiya), and the more voluntary recent seekers of economic and/or expressive opportunities abroad, who now seem to expect, consumer-wise, to adopt and adapt selected elements of their chosen cultures, or, in Sudhar Mishra's more positive estimate, who opt for a "strategic espousal of rootlessness."

But, I shall hazard, no Indian English writer, even the earliest (two of whom, joined in their own chapter, again were obscure to me: Behramji Malabari and Govardhanram Tripathi), is unmixed culturally. Coming closer toward the present, almost all of them are at least complacent about, if not reveling in their "hybridity." As opposed to less than two decades ago, almost no well-read person or writer now deplores the use of Indian English for expressing one or another Indian experience. Nothing seems excluded now from the purview of Indian English, since it is constantly being extended by adding, in italics or not, indigenous words and expressions. (Sometimes, indeed, a word occurs in these essays that requires my using my *Transliterated Hindi—English Dictionary*, another indication of the intended indigenous audience.) The only rightly deplorable fact is that other Indian languages are being further marginalized nationally and globally by Indian English, and little is being done about it, virtually nothing in this volume. There is, indeed, a final chapter dedicated to translations of other Indian literatures into English, from "the formative period" of 1770 to 1785, on to the focus on exchanging religious and later classic texts between East and West, and then the more recent nation-state supported enterprises. Finally, we are optimistically told, "Since the

1970s, with publishers playing a bigger role … translation activity has became [sic] somewhat more professionalized." (The obvious typographical error here indicates that such surprising lapses are more frequent than the editorial and production values might otherwise suggest.) I suppose professionalization of translation does not necessarily entail much increase in its quantity, although the recent wider compass and distribution of translations, especially of regional language fiction, could have been better noticed. Also, in my special experience, the often dubious self-translation of regional language poetry has burgeoned.

Instead of helping to countervail the deleterious effects of the rapidly expanding Indian English publishing market, particularly by promoting translations, as the book's last sentences encourage ("so that we represent ourselves to ourselves not just to others"), these essays (apart from Leela Gandhi's excellent "Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s"--many of them still writing) fail to contextualize adequately the developments in Indian English vis-à-vis other literatures, particularly in other Indian languages. We need to understand better not just individual writers' biographies and post-1800 Indian history (both delivered, as the Preface promises, in good, if sometimes distracting, measure) but the contemporaneous developments (or lack of them?) in the various regional language literatures. Indeed, it might even be argued that a survey of Indian literature in English should compare its achievements with those going on not only there but in other Anglo-phone literatures, if not in the world at large, in the Russian and German and French novel, for instance. Could more thorough contextualizing, however, avoid that inappropriate, irrelevant, and regressive Indian critical tendency to looking back (e.g., to the land's ancient, exclusionary Brahminical writings) or overseas to the culturally dominating and distant colonizing powers, Britain and America, as privileged authorities? Could there be perhaps more properly comparable writings in the languages of some other more slowly industrializing and globalizing nations, or is the Indian cultural encounter with colonialism utterly unique? But Mehrotra has cautioned us not to expect his perspective from Delhi to be like Rushdie's making his

anthology in London, because including "Pakistani writers who have engaged in certain ways with events and issues unmistakably Indian … would have [left] no grounds for excluding writers from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and perhaps from Myanmar and Nepal." Or one might add, from Indonesia, or indeed, perhaps more selectively, from any part of the world where Anglo-phone Indians have diasporically spread.

I will here, however, explicitly acknowledge personally feeling (perhaps insufficiently justified by my expressed fear of relative homogenizing by globalization and American cultural and economic imperialism) that Diasporan Indian English writers get too much play in these pages. Ultimately, my sense of the crucial issues for Indian criticism (also as previously explained)--a sense unconstrained by practicalities of finding knowledgeable critics!--suggests that the next collective effort in building a critical literary historiography should move closer to placing Indian English literature in the context of other literatures (primarily those in other Indian languages) that arise from and relate to similar cultural circumstances. Such comparisons would be highly beneficial both to bringing disparate Indian literary-cultural traditions and practices closer together and to developing a truly critical Indian tradition, using appropriately multiple broad perspectives to understand and evaluate its diverse literatures. Indeed, perhaps the best function for treating Diasporan Indian English writers in an Indian literary history might be to furnish a very closely appropriate group for comparison with those writers who have written while living immediately (rather than only imaginatively) within the Indian context. That exercise would be as clarifying and salutary for Indian criticism as other very distinct and equally appropriate comparisons with contemporaneous writers using other Indian languages. And it is in this context only that I believe the concept of "fully Indian" makes critical sense, for it applies to anyone fully engaged in living in India (though, of course, free to travel, visit, study, and even work for reasonably limited periods in other countries).

Since my reviewing generally has focussed on contemporary Indian English poets, I shall conclude by commenting on some of the essays devoted to poets and poetry. Sajni Kripalani Mukherji's twelve pages on "The Hindu College: Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt" and the following chapter by Rosinka Chaudhuri, "The Dutt Family Album: And Toru Dutt) provided me with considerably more historical and biographical information than I have previously received, but they did not convince me with a few quotations (and my memory of their work from anthologies) that any of these writers achieved significance as a poet in (Indian) English, whether in expressive or historically influential terms. I have the same complaint about Amit Chaudhuri's graceful "The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore," but, after all, none of these essayists claim much for the writings rather than the writers, nor attempt to demonstrate or argue their poetic achievements in personal or stylistic terms. Mehrotra, however, successfully and suggestively accomplishes both tasks for A. K. Ramanujan's reputation in that chapter. Both Amit Chaudhuri and Peter Heehs, who writes on Sri Aurobindo (Chapter 8), at least acknowledge that their poets have attracted some controversy about their lasting poetic value, but Ranjana Sidhanta Ash is less forthright about the limitations of Cornelia Sorabji and the still much over-rated (but no doubt historically interesting) Sarojini Naidu, in my distinctly jaundiced opinion of those last two poets. Most interesting to me, of course, was Rajeev S. Patke's substantial (33-page) and repeatedly insightful and suggestive review of all the major Indian English writers of "Poetry Since Independence," generally excluding those who are distinctly Diasporan or expatriate. But horrified, I realized when I finished what I considered one of the best essays in this big book that Patke had failed to notice Rukmini Bhaya Nair, much less to credit her work as developing, at long last, a pre-eminently post-modern strain in Indian English poetry, a judgment that I have not been alone in granting *Ayodhya Cantos*, her second volume. Surely the work of Charmayne D'Souza and a few others whom Patke glancingly mentions to deepen our cultural awareness takes a distance place in that context. But I was gratified that many minor or faded reputations were forthrightly put down,

though still the common tendency toward nostalgia in historiography, especially prevalent in guru- and elder-respecting Indians, shows itself even in Singapore-sited expatriate Patke.

Altogether, however, I have few other reservations than those several already expressed about the adequacy of this text in helping to shape not only the historiography but necessarily also the canon of Indian English literature. Surely it is better to err, as Mehrotra may have done, on the side of comprehensiveness rather than to abandon to silence any of the chosen writers or subcategories. But, quite naturally, there will be readers who search here in vain for certain favorites who may not be obscure in one area or clique of the nation or another, but are disregarded by the consensus that Mehrotra claims was his guide: "[I]f the history is of a literature which has not been much historicized, [it being constructed by] more like acts of enumeration, consensus can be difficult to reach and here looks tentative rather than authoritative." He further points out, "In the omnibus essays … the decision to include or leave out a particular author was made by the contributor of that essay." So again we should be pleased that no single taste, or "unifying voice" or historical narrative line dictated the contents for this first truly comprehensive and twenty-first century history of a literature. Undoubtedly of supreme importance for all hyperliterate Indians, including Diasporans, and a major Indian publishing event as well for other specialist and non-specialist readers of Indian English writing abroad, Mehrotra's smart packaging of these literary historical essays and his selection of widely scattered critics to write them, clearly aiming at the affluent English-using Indian market at home and marginally overseas, can be hailed as one unequivocally positive result of globalization.

KRISHNA RAYAN

HERE AND ELSEWHERE

Hoskote, Ranjit, ed. *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking, Penguin Books India, 2002. pp.148. Rs.195.

Ranjit Hoskote has offered a selection from the work of eleven poets of "the second generation of post-colonial Indian poets" (i.e. those born in the 'fifties and the 'sixties) and three more born in the early 'seventies. In trying to identify what is distinctive of post-colonial Indian poetry and its phases, Hoskote's comments in his Introduction, certain remarks by Makarand Paranjape and Vilas Sarang, and J.O.Perry's statements in his review article on the present anthology use pairs of opposites: Jejuri, Puri / a bridge in California (Vilas Sarang); sacred / secular (among other things) (Paranjape); elsewhereness / locale (Ranjit Hoskote); globalized, consumerist, cosmopolitan / family-centred, tradition-bound, regionally oriented (J.O.Perry). These are not inherently hierarchical oppositions, but depending on the context or intention, one or the other term in the pair gets privileged. This is a method of attempting isolation of the defining characteristics of a body of poetry--if indeed the work of a generation of poets must always be treated as a body of poetry--but it is a method that needs to be used flexibly and with an awareness that poetry is a complex medium. Thus although the poets in Hoskote's collection are said to "situate themselves resolutely in an *elsewhereness* that provides a deeper sense of location than mere locale," there are at least two groups of poems that are associated with "locale."

The first group is composed of poems which are concerned with what has been called above "the sacred" as opposed to "the secular." The opposition is diluted by the activity of the attitude to the sacred typical of contemporary poetry--replacing the rapturous address to deity with wry irony, reinventing the scriptural image, talking to the chosen god as to a pal, joking, chiding, even gently

ridiculing (a mode which is in fact as old as Tukaram's Abhangs), retelling a religious fable, equipping it with a twentieth or twenty-first century moral. The first poem about the sacred in Hoskote's anthology is the short sequence "Krishna." It traverses the life of Krishna, the first two poems presenting his birth and babyhood and the third and last poem his death. Krishna is cast as a violent god. While in his cradle he dismembers winged giants and demons, and later in the Kurukshetra war, men follow him to sure death and giants flee from his sword. The *Bhagavata* / *Mahabharata* version is rewritten, and Krishna emerges as a fierce warrior prince. The adorable flute player, the dairy's child thief, the heart-throb of the milkmaids, the wise and just ruler of Dwaraka, Arjuna's charioteer and adviser (but not co-executant) of martial tactics and strategy, and the great exponent of Karma Yoga is deleted. The last poem shows an aged Krishna who realizes with a jolt that as he advanced in years he has been hugging an outdated self-image as a mighty warlord:

> Having left his squabbling palace and the city, Krishna
> paused to drink
> From a stream in a place of smooth stones overhung
> with leaves,
> And, stooping, his hands cupped, saw a strange old man
> staring
> Back at him from the disturbed waters. He recoiled in
> surprise ….
> Recovering, he drank the flowing water and drinking
> understood:
> He washed his feet for the fatal arrow, found a grassy
> spot to lie.

It is a violent end to a violent life.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair's "God from Bankura" is not exactly about Ganapati the god. It is instead an ingenious and witty piece on a clay image of Ganapati from Bankura, the well known source of the red clay figures of long-necked short-legged horses and women

that adorn our curio cabinets. An image of a god must represent divine attributes and attitudes. But the clay Ganapati here, sharing space in the potter's yard with other clay products, has human reactions and feelings:

> The smallest horse was twice his size,
> And as for the women--wow! Be wise.
>
> A god has to be. Smart, that is.
> Four arms were quite respectable,
> Really. Belly button, long proboscis,
> And a dhoti--all his ….
>
> His
> Sole job was to make people happier, richer,
> Etc. Forget about the horses--and the women.
>
> So he set to work on the etc., which kept him
> Busy enough, god knows--and detached.

Vivek Narayanan has two poems linking Hollywood (Chennai) and Heaven. "Shooting," which shows the goddess Gautami in a printed salwar and Vijaykanth as the god, summoned by the extras, the crowd and the policeman, on Elliot's Beach, captures the lively bustle of a shooting scene and is a very readable poem; one wishes one could say the same about "MGR Meets God in Person." The third poem of "religious" interest is more successful. The poet, a guest at a service in an improvised chapel in a classroom in Upstate New York, finds that while the rest are singing in unison, a poem forms in his head, engaging him in a different kind of worship, fit in Wordsworth's words, for "a pagan suckled in a creed outworn." He finds himself adoring the winter light entering the room through the window, filtered between the snow-laden branches of an oak.

H. Masud Taj's "Medina Highway" disengages itself from the contemporary gestures and mannerisms of writing about the sacred and is a resonant paean in praise of divine omnipotence in the

language of images of a highway. The highway becomes the universe in microcosm, with its eternity of distances and heights, its unstoppable onrush of time, its teeming multitudinous life controlled by a powerful law. The poem is a resounding celebration of this realm of infinity, system and speed and a rapturous invocation addressed to the presiding force:

> Lord of high tension and loose slung cables;
> Lord of earth-moving machines and oversailing cranes;
> Lord of underpasses and flyovers;
> Lord of all eye levels made available….
>
> Lord of the left hand on the steering wheel;
> Lord of the right hand on the mobile phone;
> Lord of speech at any speed;
> Lord of quickening thought that precedes.
> That connects knuckles to mountain ranges,
> The steering wheel to encircling horizon;
> The eye's convexity to the sky's concavity.
> Lord of radiation and gravity;
> Lord of distances and intimacy.

Another opposition among those listed at the beginning is the familial vs. the cosmopolitan. There are at least nine poems in Hoskote's collection which group themselves around the family theme. The family as an entity is represented in these by either the father or the grandfather or, most conspicuously, the grandmother.

There are two poems in this group which interestingly embrace both terms of the antithesis--the familial and the global--and are the only ones to do so. In Tabish Khair's "To my Father, across the Seven Seas," the son, now living abroad, grips his father's hand more firmly than he did when they sat at the wicker table with cups of tea:

> The wicker table contained seven seas and one more:
> I faced the West, you faced the East.

In C.P.Surendran's "Cabbie," the father sets out in a taxi to be with his child who is lying sick in hospital. He takes his copy of Joseph Brodsky's book of poems as "There are words / In there that might be of help." When he alights from the taxi, he absent-mindedly leaves the book behind and it is lost for ever.

> He steps into the ward
> And gazes at his baby,
> Suspended
> Between two worlds
> Of opposing fares.
> Tears speed into his eyes
> From the words he lost.

The only poem that the group has on the grandfather is Vijay Nambisan's "Grandfather's beard." It is the name of a "wind-blown seed with white filaments," but "I never saw such a beard on my grandfather…." Yet

> I would like my poem to be
> Like my grandfather's beard, to be airy
> In the lean wind, to look up at the clouds
> And laugh.

There seems to be a contradiction or some confusion here, but the simple-sounding poem is packed with ambiguities and apparent illogicalities too dense to be analyzed here.

Jeet Thayil's "My Grandmother's Funeral" and Ranjit Hoskote's "A Poem for Grandmother" are, both of them, powerful elegies and, as befits intimate emotion, direct utterances. Thayil's grandmother died full--perhaps too full--of years; Hoskote's grandmother died young in childbirth. The two lives which ended thus are played now on the screen of memory and dream in vivid poignant images. The one perfected her many children; the other grew up with her children. Thayil's poem, which begins with a

report on the Syrian Christian funeral, ends by telling of the grandmother's final utterance--a resounding No to pointless prolongation of life. Hoskote's grandmother's message, repeated in his dreams, is an equally loud and emphatic No to the common facile praise of generosity:

> Hoard your powers, she says, do not give
> from the core, my son, do not give.
> Giving spites the flesh, corrodes intention.
> Most unreliable of barters, most memorable of sins,
> giving kills. My son, do not, like Karna,
> rip off the armour that is your skin.

In Vijay Nambisan's "The Attic," the grandmother sends her grandson up the stairs to the long-neglected attic to explore it and retrieve anything that deserves to be preserved. He only finds doves and bats and nothing more worthwhile than a piece of carved wood. She is not quite satisfied that there aren't valuables hidden amid the junk. She lets the boy go out and play, and

> then with slow
> Time-burdened steps, feeling within herself
> Every moment she has lived, acknowledging tiredly
> Every wrinkle in her breasts, she begins to climb.

In Tabish Khair's "Amma:"

> Down the stairs of this house where plaster flakes and falls,
> Through the intimate emptiness of its rooms and hall,
> I hear your slow footsteps, grandmother, echo or pause….
> Slowly you shuffle examining each new tear in the curtains
> Which will have to be mended when the first monsoon rain
> Provides a respite from sun, curtails the need for shade.

Both personalities sum themselves up in this single-minded devotion to the mission of salvaging what is old, decaying and threatened. Both are as deeply rooted to the house as Thayil's

grandmother "alone inside the one house/generations of sons and daughters embarked from" and Hoskote's grandmother who "kept house/in a city of merchant ships." So is Arundhati Subramaniam's grandmother in "Heirloom," but with a difference. She may be in the kitchen stirring aromatic soups as she hums family tunes, but in her Kanjeevaram silk sari's swirls

> she carries the secret of a world
> where nayikas still walk
> with the liquid tread of those who know
> their bodies as well as they know their minds;
> still walk down deserted streets
> to meet dark forbidden paramours
> whose eyes smoulder like lanterns in winter;
> and return before sunset,
> the flowers in their hair radiating
> the perfume of an unrecorded language of romance.

This world of amorous intrigue is revealed in the naughty erotic lyrics that are cited in the 9th to 11th century Sanskrit classics of poetics as example of dhvani.

The first piece in Jerry Pinto's sequence "Exiled Home from Burma" records the grandmother's farewell to the country before leaving in anticipation of the Japanese advance. His next poem "Sleep" refers to "the girl of eighteen who went with her brother's disembodied arm around her shoulders to Burma…." But it is an enigmatic, obscure poem, powerful and deeply disturbing. It, however, completes the picture developed in the five preceding poems, of the grandmother as the symbol of the cohesion and continuity of the family.

The poems that we have looked at closely are by ten out of the fourteen poets in the anthology. In the work of these (and, one presumes generally in the poetry of our time) the local is seen to rub shoulders with the global, the familial with the cosmopolitan. Although Hoskote's main thesis is that the poets in the collection

"situate themselves resolutely in an *elsewhereness* that provides a deeper sense of location than mere locale," he also does say: "If this poetry emerges from a metropolitan consciousness and is informed by the experiences of speed and novelty, violence and isolation, it can also overcome the brittleness of the contemporary to adapt, critically, the forms and impulses of tradition." This Janus-facedness (using the word in its non-pejorative sense) invests the poems in Hoskote's anthology with an ambivalence and complexity that makes it uniquely rich.

The anthology has its omissions, some of them feared to be obvious. But identifying omissions is always arbitrary; so is classifying them as obvious and not so obvious. And which anthology has been free from omissions? The criteria applied for selection are some of them spelled out, others not; some are conscious and others instinctive; some rational, others instinctive. In the net, an anthology is an inescapably personal product. Hoskote says, "I have chosen to focus on poets who recognize poetry as a sacramental rather than an instrumental use of language and who do not treat it as a vehicle for the delivery of raw ideology or sentiment. I prize the tautness and texture of expression, the vivid and sensuous materiality of the image, the variegation of authorial strategy…." I feel Hoskote has largely succeeded in bringing together poems which answer to the description. Reading *Reasons for Belonging* has been a satisfying experience.

SHYAMALA A. NARAYAN

INDIAN LITERARY CRITICISM

Rayan, Krishna. *The Lamp and the Jar: Essays*. Ed. Krishna S. Arjunwadkar. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002. pp.255. Rs.130.

Shankar, D.A., V.K.Natraj and M. Sathyanarayana Rao, eds. *Theory in Practice: Essays in Honour of C.D.Narasimhaiah*. Mysore: CDN Felicitation Committee, 2001. pp.351. Rs.395.

It was William Walsh, one of the earliest critics of Indian English literature, author of *Indian Literature in English* (in Longman's "Literature in English Series") who referred to Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao as the "big three" of Indian English fiction. Indian English literary criticism too has three leading practitioners (as G.S.Balarama Gupta has pointed out): K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1908-1999), C. D. Narasimhaiah (b.1921) and M.K.Naik (b.1926). Considering Krishna Rayan's *The Lamp and the Jar*, and his earlier books like *Suggestion and Statement in Poetry* (1972), *Text and Subtext* (1987), *The Burning Bush: Suggestion in Indian Literature* (1989), and *Sahitya, A Theory* (1991), we should talk of four, rather than three, leading critics of the earlier generation. The eldest, Srinivasa Iyengar (1908-1999), seems to be have increasingly devoted his attention to poetry and translation in the last two decades; the third edition (1983) of his pioneering work, *Indian Writing in English* (first published in 1962) was written in collaboration with his daughter Prema Nandakumar. C.D. Narasimhaiah and M.K.Naik have been quite prolific, publishing their own criticism as well as many edited anthologies. Both have laid emphasis on formulating an Indian approach to literary criticism, which would incorporate the best of western and Indian theories. Krishna Rayan (b.1918) too does the same, but with a difference: while Narasimhaiah and Naik have written very few essays devoted to theory (their theoretical stance emerges more clearly in their practical criticism), Krishna Rayan does not fight shy of discussing theory and has some fine essays analysing modern western critical theories, juxtaposed with Sanskrit poetics. *Sahitya:*

A Theory for Indian Critical Practice (1991) sets out a strategy of literary criticism which is based on the best of Indian and Western thought. His presentation is marked by great clarity; no special grounding in Sanskrit or Tamil aesthetics is required to follow his argument. He has formulated a theory of "Suggestion" based on the "Dhvani" theory of Sanskrit poetics.

The Lamp and the Jar, subtitled "Explorations of New Horizons in Literary Criticism," comprises 24 essays written over the last two decades. The range is impressive--there are purely theoretical essays as well as fine examples of "practical criticism," analysing texts ranging from *Samskara* to *Murder in the Cathedral.* The editor, Krishna S. Arjunwadkar, a senior professor of Sanskrit, is an authority on the *Kavya Prakasa* of Mammata. The first nine essays deal with different aspects of modern western literary theory and Sanskrit poetics, and provide a fine introduction to some basic tenets of Sanskrit poetics. The strong formalistic bias of Sanskrit poetics enabled it to retain its "secular character despite the formidable prestige and authority of the reigning institutions in a theo-centred morally prescriptive culture"(3). He shows how "some of the principal insights of the Rasa-Dhvani theory are found to coincide with the assumptions and conclusions of contemporary Euro-American literary theories"(6). He advocates a critical practice based on Indian theories not in a spirit of revivalism but because "a theory which had its origin in the Indian cultural tradition must be uniquely powerful in respect of Indian literary works. Literary theories, unlike theories in the non-human sciences, are culture-specific" (11). But he is quite aware that Sanskrit poetics, "however modern its orientation, cannot, in its *original* form, serve as a theoretical framework for present-day criticism" (emphasis added). He mentions some major lacunae: for example, it did not evolve the concept of the image, "it is ironical that Dhvani theory which is a theory of suggestion failed to isolate the prime suggestor, the image"; and it was unaware of the unconscious as the source of imagery.

One of the most interesting essays in the book, "Literary Theory and Indian Critical Practice," grapples with a basic question of literary theory, "What is literariness?", which can be rephrased as "How does a literary text work?". He considers the insights provided by ancient Indian poetics (the Sanskritic theories and the old Tamil *Tolkappiyam*), as well as modern critical theory. He clearly shows that "they both focus on literature as language; they are both theories of meaning; they are both centrally concerned with such elements as figuration within the text which are constitutive of literariness; they both discount the relevance of authorial intention and place the reader instead at the centre" (26). "Evaluation then should be on the basis of these intrinsic factors and not at all with reference to the beliefs affirmed in the text, its supposed reflection of reality, its umbilical link to the author's personality and other such extrinsic factors." The value of the book lies in the fact that Rayan immediately demonstrates his theory at work--he goes on to analyse texts as different as Shakespeare's plays, *A Suitable Boy* and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's hymn "Vande Mataram." The essay "Towards a Rewritten Indian Poetic" shows a confident mastery of modern literary theory. He demonstrates how Dhvani can be better understood in relation to the post-Saussurean concept of loose signification, and Rasa can be elucidated in terms of reader response. "Such cross-illumination only enhances the accuracy of our perception" (36). He believes that "Genuine Decolonization consists in our appropriating from the West whatever is complementary to and compatible with our own systems of thought and belief" (36).

"Towards an Indian Critical Tradition for Indian Writing in English" lays stress on the importance of Indian English critics consciously working as a group: "Whilst each critic would naturally be free to indulge his own enthusiasms, form his own focuses of critical activity, and develop his own style, he should be conscious of objectives and approaches shared with other Indian English critics" (108). He believes that an Indian critic armed with Indian theoretical concepts is better equipped than an outsider when it comes to responding to Indian English literature in terms of its innovation with language or its Indianness. (Rayan comes to terms

with a problem which many critics are aware of, but do not mention --"the disabilities of a foreign critic of Indian Literature in English or indeed of any literature" and the ensuing problems of evaluation.) He goes on to engage in a debate with P.Lal and B.Rajan about the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, bringing to life the concept of literary criticism that T.S.Eliot and F.R.Leavis had, "the common pursuit of true judgment." The next essay, "Indian English Poetry and the Indian Poetics," analyses poems by A.K.Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, E.V.Ramakrishnan, Vijay Nambisan, R.Raj Rao and others in terms of the Rasas they evoke.

Krishna Rayan examines various aspects of the Indian critical tradition (there is a fine essay on translating Sanskrit terms) but his work is not confined to Indian literature. His poetics, based on the Rasa-Dhvani theories, enable him to provide new insights into texts as diverse as *The Waste Land* and a popular novel, *Forfeit*, by Dick Francis. *The Lamp and the Jar* consolidates the achievement of his earlier works. "The Teaching of Literary Theory," the last essay in the collection, is very different: it is about his experience as a teacher. The critical insights provided by the students are original and illuminating. Much of the credit should go to Krishna Rayan for nurturing this critical sensibility in his students. The other book under review, *Theory in Practice* is a tribute to another inspiring teacher, C.D.Narasimhaiah.

Theory in Practice is a collection of essays presented to Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah (C.D.N.) when he became eighty years old. It is much more comprehensive than the usual *festschrifts*. There are four sections: "Editorial Notes," "Impressions," "Views and Re-views" and "Select Letters, Messages and Reports" followed by "C.D. Narasimhaiah: A Résumé." The first section, "Editorial Notes," contains the personal responses of the three editors, who are eminent persons in different fields (Shankar is Professor Emeritus in English, University of Mysore; V.K.Natraj, an eminent economist, is the Director of the Madras Institute of Development Studies; while M.Sathyanarayana Rao, an English teacher, headed the College and University Teachers' Movement in Karnataka in the 'seventies and 'eighties, and was an elected

Member of the Legislative Assembly for twelve years). The second, "Impressions," is the most valuable portion of the book, sketching the character of CDN through the pen of thirteen different persons; these include contemporaries like H.Y.Sharada Prasad, Chanchal Sarkar and Damodar Thakur, students like H.S.Shivanna (one of a select group which had the good fortune of having CDN as their doctoral supervisor), and people from other disciplines like G.N.Ramu (Sociology) and N.Rathna (Director of the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing) who knew him primarily as the Principal of Maharaja's College, Mysore. Some of the reminiscences have all the drama of creative writing. G.N.Ramu's "My Principal CDN" starts with the dramatic scene of CDN, the 'sahebru,' arriving at Maharaja's College. Many of the contributors, especially the older ones, have drawn attention to CDN's sartorial style, his punctiliousness in matters of dress and deportment. The contributors who have studied under him talk very highly of his gifts as a teacher. But each and every contributor mentions his warmth and generosity, and the hospitality provided by his wife. It is good to see that the articles in the book acknowledge her contribution to her husband's greatness.

The fourth section, "Select Letters, Messages and Reports," is also of great archival value. The first item, a report published in the *Cambridge Daily News* (1948/49) of the Milton Society's Ceremonial in Cambridge, shows a side of CDN not revealed in the other articles, as President-elect of the Milton Society. F.R.Leavis' testimonial (1949) is prophetic, when he says that "Mr.C.D.Narasimhaiah…will undoubtedly be a very influential teacher." There are interesting letters from Jawaharlal Nehru, W.G. Eagleton, Leavis, V.L.D'Souza and many others.

The third section of the book, "Views and Re-Views," is much like the usual festschrift. There are forty articles on a variety of books and issues, ranging from *The Serpent and the Rope* to K.Krishnamoorthy's English translation of *Dhvanyaloka* and *Vakroktijivita*. Many of the articles (including A.Madhavan's thought provoking "For Whom do we Write?") have been published earlier, but the editors do not care to give details of first publication.

Those who are not devoted to Raja Rao will fail to see any special relevance in reprinting Raja Rao's somewhat nebulous "The Writer and the Word" ("The word indeed is eternal. . . . Man faces himself when he seeks the word. The word as pure sound is but a communication that comes from silence"). But many of the articles are important contributions to literary criticism and pedagogy. There are four outstanding essays which evaluate CDN as a critic. Prema Nandakumar's "Infectious Enthusiasm: The Literary Criticism of C.D.Narasimhaiah" pinpoints his greatest achievement as a critic, his ability to make the text "leap to life" by "pointing out all those nuances we have (or may have) missed" (224). His "is certainly not the style of the carver of phrases co-oped over the typewriter but of an orator delivering an extempore speech. The audience has to be kept spellbound." Mohan Ramanan writes on "CDN and American Literature," while Krishna Rayan's "The Critic as Crusader" (originally written as a review of CDN's *The Indian Critical Scene*: *Controversial Essays*, 1990) discusses the "polemical vigour and the consistent readability" (286) of his work.

"Prof. CDN and Theory: A Note" by C.N. Ramachandran is the most detailed analysis of CDN's literary criticism I have read; Ramachandran observes that CDN's views have evolved over the last six decades, because he "has always kept an open mind." "However, there is one field in which CDN has always been consistent all these years--he intensely disliked Theory in the past, and he dislikes Theory at present with equal intensity" (p.188). Ramachandran's study is a model of readable and witty literary criticism which is also scholarly--he meticulously documents his quotations from CDN's work. He spells Theory with a capital T, to differentiate between theories *per se* (critical frameworks) and modern theories like Structuralism and Deconstruction that CDN rejects. Ramachandran believes that the Indian tradition is Logocentric, and abstract theories that question the Centre and the Text can never mean much because "CDN is a scholar who feels Indian tradition and culture in his very bones" (192). He also believes that "CDN's distrust of Theory reflects the predicament of every intellectual in the Third World of the post-colonial period" (193).

The editors of this volume deserve to be congratulated for putting together this unusual tribute, which illuminates the personality of CDN. However, the title is somewhat infelicitous, and the editorial values leave something to be desired. We hardly know which articles are reprints, and which written especially for this volume. The dates of first publication of reprinted articles are not mentioned, in contrast to Krishna Rayan's collection of essays, where the meticulous dating and details of publication enable us to trace the evolution of his criticism. No dates are mentioned in the notes on contributors; they are content with the phrase "passed away recently." We get no clue to the age of the writers, so CDN's students mingle freely with his contemporaries, who are a generation older. There seems to be preponderance of contributors living in and around Mysore; perhaps the editors could have cast their net wider, to include more contributors from other cities in India and abroad. (This comment may be prompted by personal bias --I did not get the opportunity to pay a tribute to CDN. He read poems with such infectious enthusiasm that my personal dislike of modern poetry in general does not extend to Hopkins, Yeats or T.S.Eliot, just because he taught these poets to the M.A. students. It was a great privilege to work for my Ph.D. under his supervision. He had the generosity to treat me, a twenty-two-year-old who had just obtained her M.A. degree, as if I were his intellectual equal, encouraging me to think for myself when discussing my thesis, and was delighted when I disagreed with him.)

CDN's students and admirers are scattered all over India and the world, but they seem to be united in their valuation of CDN as a teacher, and his hospitality which is almost legendary. Much of his literary criticism, published in journals or seminar papers, is now appearing in book form, the most recent collection being *English Studies in India: Widening Horizons* (2002), an anthology which can rival *The Lamp and the Jar* in perception and variety. One hopes that Krishna Rayan's students too will put together their reminiscences about him--the quality of his writing suggests that he must be a brilliant teacher.

P. RADHIKA

TRACING TWO TRAJECTORIES

Mala Pandurang. *Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001. pp.191. Rs.395.

C. Vijayasree. *Suniti Namjoshi: The Artful Transgressor*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001. pp.189. Rs.375.

> "What's the use of their having names," the Gnat said, "if they won't answer to them?" "No use to *them*," said Alice; "but it's useful to the people that name them, I suppose.
>
> If not, why do things have names at all?"
>
> - Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking Glass*

The two books under review are excellent and up-to-date critiques of the works of Vikram Seth and Suniti Namjoshi. Both will undoubtedly prove assets to the canon of critical studies on major Indian writers, for two reasons. One, they are comprehensive, as they make a total as well as thorough survey of the entire oeuvre of their respective writers and highlight the multi-faceted nature of Seth's and Namjoshi's literary personalities. Two, they are insightful, as they approach Seth and Namjoshi from fresh perspectives. Nevertheless, their inclusion under the "Writers of the Indian Diaspora" series seems rather inexplicable.

When we sit down to read *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy* or *An Equal Music*, does it matter whether Vikram Seth is a writer in exile, a diasporic or immigrant writer, an Indian outsider, a non-Indian insider, an Indian insider or an international writer? How many of us readers (including academics) find the label a factor contributing to the joy we derive while going through his or any other writer's works? These questions are particularly relevant in the case of Vikram Seth who has, rather gently but always, expressed his indifference to academic pigeon-holing. One of the stock questions he himself has had to face ever since he became a literary celebrity is how it feels to be one of the "Terrible Twins of

Indo-Anglian literature." His response: "The only thing that sustains me is the thought that at this very moment, Salman [Rushdie] is probably being asked the same question." The note of exasperation is clearly evident beneath the veneer of amusement.

To be aware of this attitude of Seth's and yet publish a critical study of his works under the rubric "Writers of the Indian Diaspora" would indeed take a brave heart. And this is what Ms Mala Pandurang displays with her work *Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*. She herself quotes Seth as saying that "these imaginative categories are fascinating but in the final analysis irrelevant" (34). This irony falls into still sharper focus as Mala Pandurang implies in the very introductory chapter that "the body of creative writing produced by Vikram Seth does not readily fall into a category of the diasporic imaginary." Then what prompted her to place Seth in this group is a question that she does not tackle at all.

In the second chapter "The Poet and the Traveller in China: Mobility and Cross-Cultural Interactions," Ms Pandurang makes an intensive study of Vikram Seth's poetic anthologies as well as his travelogue. She presents an overview of Seth's thematic concerns and concludes that the recurrence of certain motifs shows him up as an artist who has the rare ability to respond both sensitively and sympathetically to the various cultural environments he moves through, and to realize the truth in the philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*. The third chapter analyses the work that gave Seth his first substantial taste of success, *The Golden Gate*. Titled "*The Golden Gate* and the Yuppies of Silicon Valley: A Critique of the Hypermodern," it details the circumstances leading to the composition of this novel in verse, makes a brief study of its structure, gives a report of the critical reception it enjoyed the world over and studies Seth's depiction of Yuppiedom. The next two chapters separately concentrate on *A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music*. They follow much the same pattern--a note on the details of composition followed by an in-depth analysis of the theme and the response of the readers.

In the course of these chapters, Ms Pandurang weaves a very credible hypothesis about Vikram Seth as a strong and insistent espouser of the philosophy of self-discipline. For all their variety in form, tone and texture, *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music*, she argues, seem to be not merely harping on but virtually "advocating a path of moderation, restraint and avoidance of excess." Her final assessment is that Vikram Seth is a humanist for whom telling stories in the most accessible language is the only important concern. There are no specific causes to uphold, no special agendas to follow. The way Ms Pandurang distils Seth's worldview from his works is indeed commendable.

However, much of its focus is lost because the thematic exegesis gets interrupted by a study of various other issues--like Seth's concept of India as a nation state, his depiction of women characters and the subaltern, his handling of the English language and other miscellaneous matters. A separate chapter on them would perhaps have given the work a neater look. Typographical/proof-reading errors exceed the limits of a discerning reader's tolerance. To cite one example:

> Seth begins the foreword to the 1990 edition of *From Heaven Lake* by protesting against the brutality of the Chinese authorities against non-violent Tibetan demonstrators, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Dalai Lama's forced flight from Tibet. He also condones the tragic carnage of the students who were staging a peaceful demonstration to demand political reform, in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. (55)

It may not require much mental effort to substitute 'condemn' for 'condone' but the oversight is rather unpardonable. Later, when "a six-month intensive course in Chinese" is subsequently referred to as a "six-month curse", one wonders whether there is a pun intended!

As with Vikram Seth, the question of appropriateness of labels crops up when we consider Suniti Namjoshi. If Seth has a personal dislike for categorization, Namjoshi, through her works, shows how any kind of rigid categorizing will eventually prove misleading. Technically speaking, Namjoshi fits into the mould of a diasporic writer, first because she has settled in England (Canada earlier) but still retains links with her native country, and second because some of her works (particularly the very early poems and her latest work *Goja*) touch upon the émigré's unique experiences, both of joy and sorrow. Yet she moves far beyond such concerns and champions greater and more urgent causes. Ms Vijayasree herself states in her conclusion that her "study has identified fluidity and inconclusiveness as the distinctive features of Namjoshi's writing. Therefore, any attempt to offer conclusive observations will go against the very thesis of this argument" (157). As with Ms Pandurang, Ms Vijayasree also chooses to ignore the inconsistency inherent in underscoring the "fluidity and inconclusiveness" she sees in Namjoshi's works and yet putting it under the a not-so-fluid category.

Going chronologically through the Namjoshi canon, Ms Vijayasree traces the writer's development and shows how Namjoshi's works graduate from a mere handling of various social issues to a more focused interest in lesbian feminist ideology. From her detailed study, we see the strategies Namjoshi employs to question male superiority. Namjoshi indeed comes through as the ultimate transgressor by preferring fantasy to realism, contradictions to consistency and discontinuous texts to neatly ordered verbal structures. Her penchant for subversion and her revisionist myth making not only creates new works of art but also decimates powerful and oppressive patriarchal symbols. The conclusion Ms Vijayasree draws is that Namjoshi is "an allegorical fabulator." Her interview with Namjoshi, appended to the study, forms an effective complement by giving a personal touch to the objective analysis. Ms Vijayasree's lucid style and the almost error-free typescript make *Suniti Namjoshi: The Artful Transgressor* good reading.

In a general sense, all genuine artists are transgressors because they go beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking or conventional modes of expression. Vikram Seth and Suniti Namjoshi's works--as these studies show us--seem to overshoot all expected levels of conventionality. That Seth and Namjoshi choose to interweave different generic strands in their literary looms and create designer texts, so to say, is definitely a measure of their originality. And precisely for this reason, their works rebel against any form of nomenclature. Won't it be better then to be led by the Gnat of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and decide not to give them names "if they won't answer to them"?

ARUNDHATHI SUBRAMANIAM

TWO POETIC SENSIBILITIES

Anita Nair. *Malabar Mind.* Calicut: Yeti Books, 2002. pp.97. Rs.150.

Jane Bandari. *Aquarius.* Mumbai: Harbour Line, 2002. pp.72. Rs.100.

Anita Nair's is a restless poetic voice. It is a voice that seethes, that crackles, that would like to speak of many things, serially and simultaneously, that would like to speak in different registers and voices. It is a voice of warmth, of energy--a voice that engages.

It is also unmistakably an accomplished voice--one that has done its time in the charged heat and tumult of the smithy of language, having savoured the textures, inflections, possibilities and limitations of words.

The result is a welter of geographical and psychological landscapes, as the poetry extends from the wavering moment of contentment experienced by Mr Patel on the London Underground to the patronising wisdom of Paul, the visiting Czech; from the existential crisis of a contemporary urban Indian crow to the distillation of a moment on a quintessential Goan beach. The collection traverses a fair expanse of tonal terrain as well--from the intimate love poem with all its attendant ironies to more consciously philosophical reflections that ponder the moment of 'a strange unbearable/ emptiness' or those times when 'dark and silence/ walk hand in hand'; from the humorous bits of whimsy about the cow or Sunshine, the Colony cat, to the more formal oracular address of 'the fierce god Muthappan,' 'lord of the jungle, son of the tortured vines' in 'Mostly a Man, Sometimes a God.'

The implicit peril in poetry that extends itself in many directions-- tonal, thematic, stylistic--is that it could well end up in

more than one cul-de-sac. Nair's poetry certainly does not lack ambition, but it does on occasion lack the rigour necessary to translate its intent into effective poetry. And so you sometimes have a torrent of 'heavy' nouns where Nair could well have inserted an image for more evocative impact. 'No memories./ No dreams./ No fears./ No desires./ No pain' in 'A Baga Imprint,' for instance, seems more spelt out than necessary. Or else you find the pitfalls inherent in the 'list' poem where you are offered a catalogue of passive snapshot details ('Twinkling light house./ Bent cigarette butts./ Squealing pig./ Ghost boat./ Juggler practising'--also from the same poem).

Nouns are certainly not incapable of impelling a poem forward-- it is a myth that the attribute of dynamism belongs solely to the verb. Indeed, there are times when Nair uses the noun to great effect, and so you have the hypnotic, incantatory quality of 'Malibar/ Manibar/ Mulibar/ Munibar/ Malibar/ Melibar/ Minibar/ Milibar/ Minubar/ Melibaria/ Malabria' in the title poem, 'Malabar Mind.' But when these moments recur frequently and in more predictable ways ('Wave after wave/ of lunch/ of bitterness/ of love gone asunder/ of aloneness/ of meetings/ of silences'), you do wish the poet had looked more strenuously for the alternatives of which she is clearly capable.

The other risk that Nair's poetry sometimes courts is that of overstatement. This holds true of poems like 'The Soldier's Song' or 'The Cosmopolitan Crow' where the predicament of the crow is underscored to the point when it loses even the suggestiveness of a parable. So you have a crow asking 'Caw, caw, who am I,' wondering if other cultures are capable of understanding how it is 'to be anchored by a thousand year old tradition,' and finally realising that whether it is the United States of America or India, 'if you are a crow or a raven,/ life's the same anywhere.' At these junctures, the didactic need to underscore the anthropomorphic intent of the image deprives the poem of what could have been achieved through metaphoric resonance.

And yet there is much to admire in Nair's collection as well. My personal favourite is 'The Face Mask' where the mundane face-pack of a little sandal, turmeric, 'drippy sour' yoghurt and 'rose-watered hope' becomes the occasion that opens up the magical possibility of exfoliating the past 'speckled with yellow 'maybes'.' Then there is the delightful 'Grasslands' that extols the virtues of glorious uncomplicated bovinity--a life 'ruled by their four stomachs'--which concludes with that lovely line, 'A cow's only expression is its moo.' Or consider 'Sunshine--The Colony Cat,' a poem that deftly evokes a cat with an unexpectedly 'savage need to be loved' (rather than the more predictable image of self-containment), and includes the memorable line: 'Somewhere in her is a mew/ that has yet to find a voice.' 'The House is Waiting,' barring a couple of occasions when it is weighed down by excessive statement, is another richly atmospheric evocation of a house that is either 'dead' or 'waiting.'

What one also carries away from this book are several images that reveal a sensibility that has interesting ways of refracting the world: 'Light streamed/ an ochre of a curry gone rancid'; or 'the toilet bowl/ where all the oceans/ of the world have gathered'; or lust with its fragrance 'of sunshine, grass and sly desires'; even the unexpected detail of the lady in 'a red silk caftan' in 'Why Women Dream.'

After *Malabar Mind*, Jane Bhandari's *Aquarius* presents a study in contrast. The broad exuberant strokes with which Nair paints her poetic canvas are replaced here by muted tones, a more consciously circumscribed ambit.

These are meditations on water, as the title suggests. Water pounds, crashes, dribbles, clatters and seeps its way through the work. It makes its presence felt in multiple avatars: from the ocean to lily pond, from rainfall to the bird-bath, from the well to the vicarage fountain that 'did not fount.' Irrespective of the volume of water, however, the author's voice (unlike Nair's more expansive tone) remains restrained and understated, a resolute murmur. There

is no striving after effect, no careless flamboyance, only a conscientious attention to detail, and a determined air of quiet.

This quiet is deceptive. It is easy to dismiss it, particularly in an age that valorises volume, as an indication of slight or trivial poetic preoccupations. But as you journey through the book, you find that this very refusal to raise the voice enables you to hear other things: the undercurrent, the muffled ripple, the unspoken cadence. And so you can hear 'the rising note of pouring tea/ Staccato sugar and milk' (in 'Liquid'), the inaudible murmur of the bird-bath 'full of stars/ And fallen flowers, under alien skies' in 'The Clock House,' or the gossip of rain-drenched crows 'pegged out by their feet to dry' in, or simply the silence of 'satin pools' in 'Catching Crayfish.'

There were times when I wished for some respite from the painstaking articulation of minutiae, some space that would allow the poem to breathe. But I began to realise that it was precisely this quality in Bhandari's work that gives rise to an interesting creative tension-- between the vast inexactitude of water and the writer's impulse to contain it in incisively defined poetic moments. For what she seeks to document is an essentially non-archivable element--capricious, protean, unpredictable, capable of cleansing but also obliterating, and often (when one gets too hot on its trail) given to simply evaporating! It is, in fact, the writer's unwavering focus on the concrete, the particular, that keeps the water image from vaporising into foggy mysticism.

The unwavering focus on the aquatic gradually makes one aware of all that the writer does not talk about--the terrestrial world, for instance, with its vast inexhaustible panoply of messy human conflicts. The persona in the poems is observer, eavesdropper, committed transcriber, narrator (occasionally using the odd childhood anecdote to amplify an insight), but seldom enters the poem in a more participatory or dynamic way. This, one senses, is intentional: water seems to be deliberately invited into the creative landscape for its ability to erase, to cleanse and make new. This

readiness to set history adrift is implicit in several poems, but in 'Steel Blue' is actually made explicit: 'I wish not for the unchanging blue of the steel,/ But for the possibility of change: to reflect/ The blue of the sky within my waters,/ And change as the sea changes eternally.'

In 'Night Lights,' this articulated desire turns into a celebration of the impermanent, a reconciliation, quietly exultant, with the world of mirage: 'Solid buildings become/ Ethereal constructs/ Of airy delicacy, glittering/ In rain-washed dark,/ Suspended between sea and sky.' Or yet again in 'Scaffolding': '…the building/ Is encased in a fragile cage/ Of unwavering bamboos/ Like a reflection in water/ Against the sky.' And thus does solid turn fleetingly liquid, and the terrestrial, for a moment, become 'Aquarius.'

Malabar Mind and *Aquarius* are books authored by writers with markedly divergent sensibilities--a reminder of the plurality of the contemporary English poetry scene in India, one that simply cannot be dismissed (as it still is in so much fundamentalist writing on the arts) as stodgy and monolithic.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

THREE POETS

Arundhathi Subramaniam. *On Cleaning Bookshelves.* Mumbai: Allied Publishers Ltd., 2001. pp.72. Rs.150.

K. Srilata. *Seablue Child*. Kolkata: The Brown Critique, 2002. pp.68. Rs.150.

M. Mohankumar. *Nightmares and Daydreams*. New Delhi: Virgo Publications, 2002. Rs.160.

There is nothing meaty to bite into in much of contemporary Indian poetry in English. The practitioners have no time to educate themselves on the experienced past of their ancestors nor do they have the mountaineer's tenacity to explore new areas in harsh terrain, be it theme, form or poetic nuances of whorled symbolism. Often I have a feeling that the poets are downloading a few pages from their diaries and no more. Grandparents, remembered wrongs and if a poet wants to catch the 'eye' of the reader, a cross-eyed look at Indian culture or recordation of a sexual misdemeanour. A sad watershed, perhaps.

But you do not have the heart to condemn poetry publications of today because they are increasingly tuned to fine production values. No more the days when Toru Dutt's *A Sheaf Gleaned from the French Fields* was hailed by Edmund Gosse more than a hundred years ago: "When poetry is as good as this, it does not matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore." *On Cleaning Bookshelves* has a quizzy cover with the dual profile of an ageing face straining towards wisdom and has a charming young Arundhati looking at you with a bemused smile on the blurb at the back. Enviable error-free print (though the thin paper gives the look of forme-proofs) too and the assurance of Andrew Wade

who plans to explore some of the poems with his actors in Royal Shakespeare Company.

Arundhathi herself is an uncomplicated being, content to review her diary about growing up. The grandparents turn up often in the poems as lovable ancients who nevertheless could not face reality when the poetess threatens romance with a Pakistani cricketeer. "I am, for just this moment, /conquistador of the blank page." The splash of ink, however, does not besmatter the pages as in a battlefield, but vanishes as drops of rain in a hot summer. Passions do not rock Arundhathi. She is just cool. Even when limning apostrophised maleness, or watching the hysterical splash of Niagara or hushed by the clinical isolation in a Cardiac Care Unit, Arundhathi remains unflappable. We have also Arundhathi's version of an Eliotesque Macavity, but her cat is no mystery. Fellini is just "my bonsai lioness / my storm-in-a-teacup."

Srilata tries to give depth to her jottings by relating to the blue seas in several poems. Look at the "Seablue Child" with two pigtails on the seashore, gazing at the infinity beyond. We do miss Arundhathi's carved phrases, but rough edges (including the poor attempt at rhymes in "E-mail from a Friend Abroad") do not matter when the subject hits you on the forehead without a warning, as "This Separate Anger Growing Inside Me". That our part-time poets can manage even the taste of 'Ugadi Pachadi' to be the subject of a philosophical dictum, or trace well the trajectory of dirt finding its way unerringly into the baby's mouth is commendable. Recordings of everyday, though not poetry for all time.

Mohankumar's *Nightmares and Daydreams* seems metal more attractive for the passionate lover of sustainable poesy. Once again recordings on memory's tape downloaded at will are heard in Mohankumar's verse. Memories that refuse to vanish. Like the scenario in "Murder in the School." Sickness is a recurrent subject and even colours the diction of Mohankumar. Death too is not far away. And the poet's sleight-of-hand can even make a corpse speak

to us from the mortuary. The title of the volume and the poems themselves are of a piece but depression can lead to a poetic flash:

> "There is no godhooli
> These days.
> Only clouds of dust
> Mixed with
> Carbon monoxide."

One could simply say it is no more than a sentence that has received five cuts. But no matter. Here is a verse we can remember when we cough and choke in Mera Bharat Mahaan.

PREMILA PAUL

A POET'S RESPONSES TO PAINTINGS

Bhatt, Sujata. *A Colour for Solitude.* Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002. pp.112. £7.95.

A Colour for Solitude is the sixth volume of Sujata Bhatt's poems, and it is written mainly as responses to the different paintings of Paula Modersohn-Becker. Sujata Bhatt had first come to know of Paula from Rainer Maria Rilke's famous poem, "Requiem for a Friend." In 1985 during her first visit to Germany, Bhatt was able to see the exhibition of Paula's paintings in the *Kunsthalle Bremen*. The experience was so intense that Bhatt recorded her reactions in poems of her own: "Clara Westhoff to Rainer Maria Rilke" (*Brunizem*, reprinted as "No Road Leads to This" in *A Colour for Solitude*), and "For Paula Modersohn-Becker" (*Brunizem*, reprinted as "Was it the Blue Irises?"). A similar poem, "Paula Modersohn Speaks to Herself," in *The Stinking Rose* reappears as "Self-Portrait on My Fifth Wedding Anniversary" in *A Colour for Solitude*. Thus, most of the poems in this latest volume are Sujata Bhatt's attempts to speak in the words of Paula, or of Clara Westhoff, a talented sculptor, who actually married Rilke. More accurately, they are efforts to speak as Sujata Bhatt imagined Paula and Clara might speak.

The influence of Paula's paintings grew on Bhatt. According to her, Paula's choice of and approach to her subject are "simple and straight forward," but "the result is always unusual and frequently provocative" ("Author's Note," *A Colour for Solitude* 9). Bhatt admits that she is invariably drawn to subjects that demand research. She had to spend long hours in museums and also had to collect all the available letters, journals, and manuscripts related to Paula. Bhatt does not see research and poetry as disparate pursuits. She feels that "facts often free the imagination to probe deeper, to imagine things that otherwise could not have been imagined" ("Author's Note" 11).

Art for Sujata Bhatt is not necessarily an entity distinct and distant from the artist and her life. The painter speaks about herself and her perception of life through her paintings. Bhatt's poems in turn make a subjective interpretation of the paintings and the painter. Arduously collected biographical details serve the purpose of prompting the poet's imagination. The poems do not claim to provide authentic accounts of the emotions of Paula, who lived and died before Sujata Bhatt was born. But the volume indicates Bhatt's total involvement with Paula's paintings, her life, the people closely associated with her, and their own contribution to art.

Paula Modersohn-Becker is now considered the most significant German woman painter of the twentieth century, but in her life time only three or four of her paintings were sold. Rainer Rilke was the first to buy her painting, "Infant with its Mother's Hand," to encourage her artistic gifts, and also to help her financially at a time when she had severed her relationship with her painter-husband, Otto Modersohn. Paula died at the age of thirty-one of embolism, eighteen days after giving birth to her only child, Mathilde (Tille) Modersohn. During the Nazi regime her paintings were condemned as "degenerate" and sold to museums in the United States. Some of them, hidden and saved by her daughter and by devoted friends, are now in museums in Germany and other parts of Europe.

Sujata Bhatt now lives in the neighbourhood of the *Kunsthalle Bremen*, a few miles from Worpswede where Paula had lived. This has made possible visits to the museums and the places associated with Paula, as well as Rilke and Clara, his wife. In her poem "Was it the Blue Irises?" Bhatt tells how her lingering in a museum and absorbing Paula's paintings had roused the suspicion of the guards there.

Bhatt admired Rilke very much as a poet, and she read almost everything that he wrote, including his available letters and journals. In the process she came to know of his fascination for Paula and his hasty marriage to Clara Westhoff. Bhatt became

interested in the works of all the three artists and eventually in their relationships too.

A Colour for Solitude is the only volume of Bhatt's poetry that has not been divided into sections. The volume as a whole reveals the growth in the poet's relationship with the dead artists. Paula and Clara appear and reappear like twin protagonists in a narrative, prompting the readers to reconstruct the situations in the lives of these artist characters. The titles of the poems, specific references to the speaker and the addressee, and the author's note that introduces the volume--all these help in this reconstruction. Bhatt has used the captions of Paula's self-portraits as poem titles in most cases. She feels that the urge to return to the artist's original identity is what prompts self-representation in art. So she uses the given names of the artists, Paula and Clara, in her poems to restore to them their lost identities, to let them stand on their own as people and as artists independent of relationships that restrict them.

However, obsessions have to be recognized: needs and vulnerabilities have to be acknowledged in order for these artist characters to be true to themselves. Both Paula and Clara as personae in these poems are attracted by Rilke but repulsed by his callousness. The title piece, "A Colour for Solitude, PB to RMR," shows the complex relationship between Paula and Rilke. Paula claims to have had the closest access to Rilke and affirms that the portrait she is making of him "is more intimate than sex." She sleeps with her paintings strewn around her, but Rilke's portrait alone is preserved in her mind. She confesses at one moment, "How we loved each other / those last days before / each of us married the wrong beloved…." The next moment she is confused whether to relate to him as an artist or as a woman. She questions whether they were "two artists, two misunderstood / solitudes trying to protect each other? / Or were we simply a man and a woman / unable to let go of each other--?"

"You Spoke of Italy" tells of Paula's happy times with Rilke when they could shop and spend evenings together. Paula insists on

including Clara in their company so that they could be three again when they set out on a journey. Paula could be absolutely frank with Clara about her need for Rilke. In "Self-Portrait with Two Flowers in the Left Hand" Paula is pregnant and craves for Rilke's words. She requests Clara to bring his letters. In "The Room Itself is Dying, CW to RMR" Clara speaks of Rilke's fascination for Paula and how Paula's death has denied her the chance to meet Rilke. Both the women are in love with the idea of Rilke but there is no trace of jealousy or resentment between them.

Otto, Paula's husband, becomes irrelevant for her. In "Two Girls in a Landscape" the focus is on the girls while Otto is reduced to the mere landscape itself. In "Self-Portrait with Blossoming Trees" the persona does not know how to feel like Otto's wife. In "Self-Portrait on My Fifth Wedding Anniversary" the persona imagines pregnancy but is happy to be left alone: "Exactly five years ago today / we got married--Otto and I. / But this May I am alone / at last with my *self*." In "Self-Portrait, Frontal, with a Flower in the Right Hand" she proudly proclaims that her "face has become / unreachable-- / forever out of focus" for Otto and that she has left him for good. "A White Horse Grazing in Moonlight" reiterates her stand that she has no love for Otto.

The character of Paula that emerges in these poems of Bhatt is an interesting contrast to that of Clara. In spite of Paula's obsession with Rilke, she seems to be in control of her feelings and her situation. But Clara as Rilke's rejected wife is always yearning for his attention and love. "Your Weyerberg Gaze, CW to RMR" presents Rilke's indifference to his pregnant wife. When he gazes at the fields or horizon away from her, she gets a chance to portray his bust. When they are together at such rare instances, Bhatt imagines the stirring of the child within Clara trying to participate in the moment.

"No Road Leads to This" shows Clara's utter loneliness. She lives downstairs with her sculptures, with her clay and stones, while Rilke lives upstairs with ink and paper. And it has been a month

since he had visited her. Clara pleads with him to come downstairs and see her work, her new found rare stone, the lopsided clay figure, and to experience the world "at eye level" from her window down below. "You are the Rose" shows how Clara is drawn to Rilke and is repeatedly hurt by his insensitivity. Making Rilke a model for her sculpture is one way of maintaining contact with the man. "There on the terrace / you were so far away from me-- / You did not know me anymore / and so I could see you / for what you are…." He sits with his head bowed reading as if he is praying, totally indifferent to her presence around him.

Later, in "Ruth's Wish" Clara talks about the posthumous bust of Rilke that she makes, in order to give her daughter Ruth something more than a mere photo by which to remember him. It turns out to be her masterpiece, admired greatly by her teacher, Auguste Rodin.

Both Paula and Clara try to make themselves emotionally self-sufficient through art, but some of their works betray their hopeless love for the wrong man. Clara maintains a deliberate silence despite Rilke's mistreating her, and that fact urges Bhatt to imagine the eloquence behind the silence. Paula knows her mind, is aware of her potential, and works towards its realization. There is a compulsive need for self-representation in her paintings, and her art thus becomes a means of self-assertion. She paints herself in several moods and moments, even as a sari-clad Indian and as a dark Egyptian.

During Paula's short life she remained a great source of support for Clara despite Rilke's resentment of their closeness. Many poems in *A Colour for Solitude* celebrate the value of sisterhood, and seem by implication to suggest a sisterly relation between Paula and Clara. These poems present two girls clearly distinguished in terms of their age, colour, hair, height, and clothes or lack of them. One is the protector and the other the protected. The older one is always courageous, resilient, and even capable of retaliation. In the poem "Don't Look at Me like That" Clara

gratefully attributes all her strength and achievement in art to Paula: "You made me greater / than I am…." In each of these poems the sisters seem to represent the relation between Paula and Clara. Even after her death, Paula continues to be a powerful presence in the lives of both Clara and Rilke.

Bhatt grows to be so involved with the character of Paula that her death becomes a personal loss, that of a dear sister. An artist has power and mastery over the subject. But deep involvement with it transforms the creator into a mere human being with love and longing. The way Paula and Clara represent themselves in art, the way their works are perceived by art lovers such as Bhatt, the way the poet interprets them in turn in her poems, and the way the readers understand them, work together to create an art within art in *A Colour for Solitude.*

The many self-portraits painted by Paula form one of the powerful media which gives Sujata Bhatt insight into her character. Clara has not left such extensive evidence. Her limited amount of art production is a contrast to Paula's prolific output. However, Clara asserts her presence quietly but surely by the quality of her achievements in the strenuous art field of sculpting. Her talents in this field (long considered a male bastion) have been greatly admired by art lovers.

There are other means by which Bhatt comes to know Clara intimately. Clara's private journals are still sealed and unavailable. To an extent it is Paula's writings that have helped the poet understand Clara's voice or lack of it. But in Bhatt's poem "Clara's Voice," one learns that in her old age Clara gave a public reading of Rilke's poems. She did it to oblige the public that celebrated her for being Rilke's wife. Bhatt listened to the recording of the reading. Hearing Clara's Northern accent and gentle intonation, Bhatt could intensely imagine Clara reading stories to her grandson. Bhatt also experienced a renewal of admiration for Rilke's work through her daughter's reciting his poems at school. But she feels one with the two women artists Paula and Clara and she does not want Rilke's

statements to be the ultimate assessment of either Clara or Paula: "…given Rilke's verbal expansiveness, [Clara's silence] intrigued me and it bothered me. [It] inspired me to break that silence and to imagine what she might have said" ("Author's Note" 10).

Bhatt's poems attempt to restore dignity and courage to both of these women, and to celebrate their gifts for artistic expression. She decides to give a decisive tone to Clara's voice in "21 November 1916." Rilke visits Clara after many years in a compulsive need to indulge in reminiscences of Paula. He brings with him Paula's journals and unpublished letters sent to him by her mother. He seeks Clara's assistance in editing them. It is the loss of Paula and loyalty to her memory that finally give voice and courage to Clara. She refuses to buy Rilke's assessment of Paula or to be used by him to reconstruct Paula's story. Clara learns her lesson not to give access to her journals to anyone even after her death. By means of Clara's assertion in such a poem, Bhatt gives the last word to Clara and to Paula, rather than to Rilke, in *A Colour for Solitude*.

MADHURITA CHOUDHURY

RE-PRESENTING URBAN LIFE: SANJUKTA DASGUPTA'S *DILEMMA*

Sanjukta Dasgupta. *Dilemma*. Kolkata: Anustup, 2002.

Continuing with the practice of providing positive, personal and undoubtedly contemporary poetry, Sanjukta Dasgupta presents her second book of poems, *Dilemma*.

Dilemma is about, as Dasgupta explains in her Foreword, "the micropolitics of everyday living in an urban environment….the cultural roots and commitment to the enduring earth that nurtures me." Her preoccupation with the sordidness of urban life reminds us of the present generation of enterprising Indian women poets such as Malanie Silgardo, Mukta Sambrani and Eunice de Souza. In the title poem, "Dilemma" this recurrent motif of the claustrophobic urban man gets intensified when it is clubbed with an intense desire to feel one with Nature:

> Trees like tall, dark sentinels line the main road
> But I have sauntered off;
> Scampering down the roadside I run
> Through the green rice fields
> My city high heels hurt, I take them off
> I feel the soil under my eager feet….

Similarly the poem "Urban Krishnachura" captures the combinative dilemma in its title itself. It reaches the climax in the last stanza where the poet describes the 'gulmohar' flowers in bloom as

> An annual sport by unseen players
> An exhibition game unmatched.
> From green and red, to gold, to dark brown
> Then green again, sportive silent champion.

The poem in a way deplores man's immense capacity to ignore the silent wonders of Nature. The territories of man's apathetic attitude extend from the beauties of existing Nature to the distant milestones of Indian history too. "Revisited," for instance:

> Two days after the ides of August was when
> The old man in loin-cloth
> Led the spectral pilgrims down Raj Path
> No one saw them, no one heard their sighs
> Opels, Hondas and Marutis flew past
> The shadowy procession groped daylong
> Through the fifty year old darkness
> Eager for a shaft of true light somewhere.

In the modern age marked by valuelessness and materialism, or in Dasgupta's words, "ideal-programmed pursuit of the megabuck," the dominant note in her poetry has been one of strong resentment at this unchecked spread of social malpractice and drift of values. In the poem, "My Fifty Year Old Woman," for instance, there is a clear Eliotian indictment of corrosion of values that ends with an optimistic note:

> she was alone, all alone…
> Deformed hordes swarmed and swamped
> Scrambling, grabbing, tearing, screaming
> Gnashing, gibbering rodents in flooding filth
> In fifty years raped by all she trusted
> She lived on, incorrigible woman, for a new dawn.

By the mode of re-presentation Dasgupta tries to discover the contemporary world and it is this striking quality that makes her poetry open to Whitman's "Multiple possibilities." For example, her poem "Reconstructed" relives the memory of the devastating fire in the Calcutta Book Fair of 1997. In

addition to this, the poem has a remarkable interplay of a shameful present and a hopeful future:

> "Don't worry, we'll eraze this shame
> We'll prove that we care"
> Phoenix book fair
> Reborn from its ashes
> Challenged destructive
> Deconstruction.

On one hand, some of Dasgupta's poems bring forth a picture of the urban confused man and on the other hand, some poems picturise a determined urban woman in a gender-polarised culture drawing inspiration from the extolled past:

> I am archer, warrior Chitrangada
> Not a user-friendly doormat, mate!

In this series of poems that explore the question of identity-crises in a woman, comes an extraordinary poem titled "Shame." Here, the sari symbolizes shame that later metamorphoses into an allegorical figure. Once the "textile trap" of shame is stripped off, the intrepid image of Kali as "woman Terminator" emerges:

> "Shame" is the glutinous lotion
> Clogging the woman's breathless pores
> Stepping out of textiles
> Stripping to be herself at last
> She is the sky-clad dusky Kali
> Shining rapier in uplifted arm.

But thankfully the poems of *Dilemma* are not chosen to serve as a mode to search for a "new space in the patriarchal boundaries." Rather, the poems reiterate Dasgupta's faith in today's empowered woman:

No more to be used
No more to be abused
Not just a kitten to be seduced
Then turned out by the ear.

Who is she?
A woman!
Yes, a feminist.

Whether it is a question of the sordidness of urban life or the complex issue of the identity of an urban woman, Dasgupta strikes a fine balance between oblique poetry and self-indulgent confessional poetry. The essence of these issues is not spoilt, because the poet avoids making puerile remarks as a judge. The poems are charged with optimism and each of them expresses an inert desire to see "a new dawn." *Dilemma* undoubtedly brings a whiff of freshness in this era of skepticism and disillusionment.

Dasgupta's verse is free from all the superfluities of poetry. One cannot ignore the fact that her senior colleague's advice, "Don't write for the English departments," as mentioned on the blurb, has been taken very seriously by her. *Dilemma* abjures being a product of "intellectual ostriches" whose poetry, to use Eliot's words, "exhibit an intolerable wrestle with words and meanings." *Dilemma* is, on the contrary, a testifier of "I have seen it, felt it and hence I say it" honesty.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Hara P. Das, a Sahitya Akademi Award winner for his Oriya poetry, is currently working as Director-General of Audit, Government of India.

Bibhas De, a research scientist who lives in Laguna Beach, California, has published two volumes of his poetry, in *On Grunion Shore* and *In Winter Once*.

Ananya Sankar Guha has received the Michael Madhusudan Dutt Award for his two published volumes of poetry, and is currently Regional Director, Indira Gandhi Open University at Shillong.

T. R. Joy has published a volume of his poetry, *Brooding in a Wound*. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Poetry Circle of Mumbai, and Publisher of the Circle's poetry journal, *Poiesis*.

Usha Kishore sends her essay on Tagore's poetry from her home on the Isle of Man, and is thereby the northernmost resident among the contributors to this issue of *Kavya Bharati*.

Gopi Krishnan Kottoor, the founder-editor of the quarterly journal, *The Poetry Chain*, has also edited an extensive anthology, *A New Book of Poems in English*. His own poetry has won several prizes in British Council-sponsored poetry competitions, and his additional published work includes drama and translations.

Sukrita Paul Kumar is a poet and has published three collections of poems, *Oscillations*, *Apurna*, and *Folds of Silence* and several critical books. She teaches literature in Delhi University and was invited to participated in the International Writing Programme at Iowa in 2002.

Paul Love is Director of SCILET, the Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation, at Madurai.

Darshan Singh Maini, formerly Professor and Head of the Department of English of Punjabi University, Patiala, has published political essays, critical studies of the work of Henry James, and four volumes of poetry, including the recent *The Aching Vision*. A festschrift in his honour, *The Magic Circle of Henry James*, was published in 1990.

Anju Makhija is a poet (*View from the Web*), playwright (*If Wishes Were Horses* and *The Last Train*) and script writer (*All Together*, an award-winning multi-media production for a California film festival). Her M.A. in Education media is from Concordia University, Montreal and she currently resides in Mumbai.

Rita Malhotra is Reader in Mathematics at Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi. Her poetry published in her book, *Reflections*, and in Indian and overseas journals, has won awards from both Indian and international institutions.

Hoshang Merchant is Reader in the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad. In addition to *In-Discretions* (a literary study of Anais Nin) he has published ten volumes of poetry, from which *Selected Poems* were chosen in 1999 for an anthology of his work.

Chittaranjan Misra, Senior Lecturer in English at Government Women's College in Jeypore, Orissa, has published three anthologies of Oriya poetry, as well as a study and four translations of Harold Pinter's dramas.

M. Mohankumar, I.A.S., recently retired as Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala. He has published three volumes of his poetry, most recently *Nightmares and Daydreams*, and contributed to many poetry journals.

Bibhudatta Mohanty, a poet, short story writer and translator, teaches English in a college in Puri, Orissa. His writings have appeared in many journals and several anthologies published in India.

S. Murali, until recently Reader in English at University College, Trivandrum, now teaches in the Department of English in Pondicherry University. He is also a respected artist whose paintings have received considerable attention.

Prema Nandakumar has published a novel (*Atom and the Serpent*), studies of Tamil epics and other poetry, and translations from Tamil poetry and fiction. One of India's most prolific reviewers, she has also collaborated crucially with her late father K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar in producing the monumental volume *Indian Writing in English*.

Shyamala A. Narayan teaches in the Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. She is distinguished for her extensive bibliographies of Indian literature in English which appear annually in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and which are extensively used in the "New Literatures" section of the English Association's *Year's Work in English Studies*.

Premila Paul, Reader in English at American College, Madurai, has published a book on Mulk Raj Anand and essays, principally on women novelists, in many anthologies.

John Oliver Perry, formerly Professor of English at Tufts University, has edited a volume of poems about the Indian Emergency of the 1970's and has published *Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism*. He is one of the Organizers of the Indian Critics Survey described elsewhere in this issue.

S. A. Prabhakar, who resides in Chennai, is Senior Sub-Editor for *The Hindu* there.

P. Radhika, who is Senior Lecturer in English, F.M.N. College, Kollam, has published a study of *Angus Wilson's Narrative Craft* as part of Kerala University's Golden Jubilee project, as well as several translations and critical articles.

Kalyan Raman, recipient of the Katha Translation Award, has worked in the field of satellite communications for nearly three decades. His translations of Indian fiction appear in several anthologies, and he has translated two of Ashokamitran's novellas as well as a volume of his Tamil short stories.

Krishna Rayan has taught in Universities in Zambia and Nigeria and has traveled in other African countries and in Europe. His publications include the critical studies *Sahitya: A Theory* and *The Burning Bush*. This issue of *Kavya Bharati* reviews his collected essays, *The Lamp and the Jar*.

K. Srilata, who teaches in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at I.I.T. Madras, has published *Seablue Child*, a volume of her poetry. Her anthology of translations, *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self-Respect History*, is soon to be published.

Arundhathi Subramaniam is Director of an inter-disciplinary arts forum at Mumbai's National Centre for the Performing Arts, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Poetry Circle in Mumbai. Her volume of poetry, *On Cleaning Bookshelves*, is reviewed in this *KB* issue.

James B. Swain, who taught English for many years in schools and colleges in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, now resides in Middletown, Connecticut in the United States.

SUBMISSIONS

Kavya Bharati welcomes contributions of poetry in English, review articles and essays on poetry or particular poets, well recorded interviews with poets, and translations of poetry from Indian languages into English: from resident and non-resident Indians, and from citizens of other countries who have developed a past or current first-hand interest in India.

We prefer manuscripts on A4-size paper that are typewritten, or computer printouts. We will also process and consider material that is sent by e-mail. Submissions of essays and review articles sent in any format whatever must conform to the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

All submissions must be accompanied by the full preferred postal address of the sender (including PIN code), with telephone and / or e-mail address where possible. With the submission **sufficient biodata should be sent**, similar to what is given in the "Contributors" pages of this issue. All submissions must be sent, preferably by Registered Post or Courier in the case of manuscripts and printouts, to Professor R.P.Nair, Editor, *Kavya Bharati*, SCILET, American College, Post Box No.63, Madurai 625 002 (India).

Utmost care will be taken of all manuscripts, but no liability is accepted for loss or damage. *Kavya Bharati* cannot promise to return unused manuscripts, so the sender should not include return postage or cover for this purpose.

The Editor cannot promise to respond to inquiries regarding submissions. The sender is free to give such submissions to other publishers if he or she receives no response from *KB* within one year of dispatch. Courtesy requires, however, that in such cases the sender will give prior written notification to *Kavya Bharati* that his/her submission is being withdrawn.

***Kavya Bharati* assumes that all its contributors will submit only writing which has not previously been published and is not currently being considered for publication, unless the contributor gives clear information to the contrary. Aside from the statements made here, *Kavya Bharati* cannot be responsible for inadvertently publishing material that has appeared elsewhere.**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE (NIRIEL) GULBARGA

NIRIEL (National Institute for Research in Indian English Literature) has been established with the conviction that research in Indian English literary studies can be fully realised if books, journals, and other relevant materials are made available to scholars at one place which can also eventually function as a nucleus for discussion and debate.

NIRIEL, at the moment, has a considerably substantial library of primary and secondary sources, and scholars (especially those that are doing their M.Phil., M.Litt., Ph.D., etc.) are welcome to visit it and make use of the modest facilities it offers.

Membership of NIRIEL can be acquired by paying the Life Membership fee of Rs.2000/-. Members can consult books, journals, and similar other materials at the Institute. They will also get all possible bibliographic guidance/ assistance.

All payments should be made through drafts drawn in favour of "NIRIEL".

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Dr.G.S.Balarama Gupta
Director, NIRIEL
4-29, Jayanagar, GULBARGA 585 105
Karnataka, India.
(Phone: 24282)

Donations of books/journals/cash are welcome and will be gratefully acknowledged.

Gulbarga is well connected by rail/road with all metropolitan cities like Bangalore, Bombay, Madras, Madurai, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Bhubaneswar, etc. The nearest airport is at Hyderabad.

INVITATION
TO JOIN IN THE INDIAN CRITICS SURVEY

An autonomous, self-funded, non-profit project is now underway to survey via an open-ended questionnaire the opinions and methods of all kinds of critics writing in all the Indian languages, including English, who have been actively publishing in India during the past dozen years (1990 to the present). The aims of the project are as follows.

To develop a more productive sense of community among Indian critics in all languages and of all persuasions;
To provide information about the diversity and commonality of their views, procedures, projects and crucial issues;
To reduce dependence upon methodologies, attitudes, and approaches irrelevant in the Indian critical context; and, most generally and optimistically,
To strengthen awareness, self-criticism and self-confidence in individual critics and their self-defined groups; and thus, ultimately, to strengthen the productivity and usefulness of Indian criticism as a whole and for its participants.

Individual replies to the survey questionnaire will be categorized, the types and issues commented upon and all the information published as soon as feasible.

Anyone in India actively involved with criticism, whether literary or more broadly cultural and/or social, is invited to join in this project by visiting our website <**http://www.indcrit.8m.net**> in order to get further information, to register reactions, and to download/print out the questionnaire. Alternatively one of the organizers may be contacted:

Dr. S. Sreenivasan, Editor, Journal of Literature & Aesthetics, Pattathanam, Kollam, Kerala 691 021 (email: jla1@vsnl.com)

Prof. Makarand Parnajape, N-16B, Saket, New Delhi 110 017 (email: makarand@b2bwebdocs.com)

Prof. John Oliver Perry (email: joperry2@aol.com)

A SPECIAL ISSUE OF KAVYA BHARATI!

For the near future a special issue of *Kavya Bharati* is being planned which will showcase the poetry of the Indian Diaspora.

The focus for this issue will be on the work of significant poets of Indian origin now living in many different parts of the world.

For this issue contributions of new poetry are invited from Indian writers living overseas. We also will particularly welcome scholarly essays on aspects of expatriate Indian poetry. These essays should preferably not exceed 3000 words.

All contributions should follow the principles laid down in the adjacent **Submissions** page of this issue of *Kavya Bharati*. These should be dispatched before 31 August 2004 to the following address:

Professor R. P. Nair
Editor
Kavya Bharati
SCILET, American College
Post Box No.63
Madurai 625 002, INDIA

E-mail submissions will also be welcomed, directed to <mdu_scilet@sancharnet.in>, and marked "To the attention of *Kavya Bharati*."

Send us your contribution as early as possible, and help to make this Special Issue a memorable one!

SCILET

AMERICAN COLLEGE, MADURAI

The Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation, better known by it acronym, SCILET, has one of the largest data-bases in Asia for Indian Literature in English. Its eight thousand books include texts by fifteen hundred Indian and South Asian authors. From other books and from more than seventy-five current journal titles and their back issues, critical material regarding many of these Indian authors is indexed and included in the database.

SCILET is thus equipped to offer the following to its resident members and its growing numbers of distance users in India and overseas:

1) Printout checklists of its holdings related to any of the authors mentioned above, and to selected topics pertinent to Indian and South Asian Literature.

2) Alternatively, these checklists can be sent by e-mail, for distance users who prefer this method.

3) Photocopies of material requested from these checklists, wherever copyright regulations permit.

Membership in the SCILET library is required in order to avail of the above services. Current membership rates are Rs.150/- per year for undergraduate and M.A. / M.Sc. students, Rs.300/- per year for M.Phil. students, and Rs.500/- per year for all others. Application forms for membership are available from the Librarian, SCILET, American College, Post Box 63, Madurai 625002 (India).

SCILET is developing a significant collection of material related to women's studies in South Asia. Its library also holds other small "satellite" collections of Sri Lankan, Australian, Canadian and Native American literatures. Membership in SCILET also gives the user limited access to materials in American College's special collection of about seven thousand books related to British and American Literature, which is housed adjacent to the Study Centre.

Details regarding any of these additional collections can be furnished to SCILET members on request.

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I, R. P. Nair, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to my knowledge and belief.

(Signed) R. P. Nair
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