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KAVYA BHARATI

a review of Indian poetry

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CONTENTS

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

WHEN THE DREAM RECURS

What is there in the world
when the dream recurs?
How can I believe that
you are here to do some good?
Even though I feel I had
waited for it all my life?
Caught unawares, alone
with oneself, in the circle
one cannot break?
Even when no one knows
our differences are many?
It is a pity
that you look so like me.
And when people point you out
in the streets, knowing
you are there, their eyes
clouded with mist of dreams.
If I turn my back
on Delhi's Parliament Street
and walk away from it, I know
I am still on Parliament Street.
And I wonder whether to know you
I must know you alien.
Hastening from you sometimes,
you catch up with me
as I go past, silence and shadow
in your empty hands.
If I must be cruel,
is there any need to hide it,
pretending kindness?
This world where I'd like to see you
is not meant for sunlight any more.
On sundays they all come out
and stare at the creatures in Nandan Kanan
and watch *their* power over them.
They teach them human acts.

It is a good sign
when you begin fighting with me,
at times I am funnier than a monkey.
To take you seriously
is a terrible mistake, if you are a man perhaps.
I am certain I love you
as much as ever
in spite of the alarm clocks protecting our days.
and the tragic mask left
by a landslide in the north,
in spite of young communists
proving to themselves
that they have a faith their own.
I feel certain
there is a miracle world somewhere
when you try to make me think.
But surely governments all over
can check not only act but thought.
It is better not to speak aloud
because one can lie, speaking.
But never when one is silent.
For I can't remember
anything further than these :
the integrity of India lurking
in the speeches
on history and ethics and economics,
the love of the motherland in old newspapers.
Better to set the stone back on its pedestal.
Better to find no reasons
for mass suicides or bride burning,
or to find reason, tattered with saffron attire
and sapped with the turbaned dawn.
Better to hang the photographs of Gandhi
in the hovels of Orissa where coughing
echoes hollowly in the bleeding silence.
Better I live for fear you would hear me
and bring the bulletins
sweeping down on me again.
Centuries ago you murmured a price set on me.
What is left in the world when the dream recurs?

E. V. RAMAKRISHNAN

NIGHTWALKERS

(For Safdar Hashmi)

The street gleamed a toxic blue.
Yellow swollen legs sank
barefoot into the night
of what looked like
snake-pits.
There was no sky.
Only a wall of women's
palm-prints on flakes
of dull green cow-dung.
On closer look, I could
see criss-crossing red
veins like a network
of city streets
as if every line on the palm bled.

It was an oil on canvas
with the title 'Nightwalkers'.

P. MURUGESAN

GOING HOME

Before we embarked on this journey
I warned you that we won't be seeing
Eye to eye. For I was going home
And you would be playing the tourist.
On the other hand, it could be an adventure
For you, not a trip down the memory lane,
You thought. I agreed, with a silly chuckle.

You did not complain about the crowds,
The filth, the menacing beggars and the curious
Stares of strangers on the bus, in the street,
In temples, in restaurants and hotels.
You talked only of the colourful sarees,
The elegance of women, the loveliness of
Dark-eyed children, the aroma of
Coffee and curry and the slow pace of life
Just like the last train from Jolarpet.

In Madurai, I was transformed into
A new self whom you had never known
Before, you said. You saw an extra
Zip in my walk, a new bounce in my
Talk, and it was a relief that
We did not have to ask for directions.
It's home at last, at least for me.

On cowdung-strewn streets we heard
The ding dong of rickshaws and the purr
Of autos, and amidst the smell of jasmine and
The aroma of spicy nuts, we marched on
Our eyes glued to the colossal *gopurams*
At a distance beckoning us to surrender.

At the temple, wading our way to the sanctum
Hardly noticing the statues and pillars
That engulfed us to insignificance, you
Complained of nausea and wanted to rest.
I went on, with that extra zip in my walk,
Promising to fetch you on my way back.

Handing you the offerings, ash-covered
Pieces of coconut and thumb-sized bananas,
I said, Going home is not easy.
Banana in mouth and eyes half-closed
You laughed and laughed, loud and clear,
That rippled through the irony of our journey.

SUNSET IN GOA

The shade in the coconut grove is not a shade
When my body as moist as a frog's.
But the west wind from Vasco da Gamma
Will be in soon to soothe my fenny-soaked tongue
And the crimson ball of fire will go into the water
Like a soft serve misjudged badly.

At a distance naked brown children on yellow sand
Dance to the tune of pearlish waves.
A plump, pale tourist in a green bikini
Strolls past still, curious eyes.
The woman from Madras in a bright blue silk sari
Glides along like in a wedding procession.

All this will soon mingle into the enveloping darkness.

Long ago I learned from a one-eyed teacher
That colors mingle to give pure white
Not the darkness I will be immersed in.
Then is this a summer's lie?

RABINDRA K. SWAIN

TAPESTRY OF STEPS

CROUCHED STEPS

We are all pronouns
in the absence of proper nouns for our souls.
What can be the name of a soul
That's first wounded, then held captive
and then caged in a body of language?
And we ask ourselves
What are the words of poetry?
Those we have forgotten, those we miss and those we are able
to write.

What are they?
Are they that what our apparitions bear
what takes us by our pain to our secret antechamber?
What does the ink in one's vein speak one to?
Where do the self-questionings lead one to?
Is that life an eon of tears and silence of an ancestry
where my rustling fingers like wind in the leaves grope for words.
Words of nonsense talks, meaningful talks, agitated talks, talks
of those who live among us,
who in their sleep clap with their dry bones
inside the bones of our moist words.
And as our body is serrated against sleep
a stone within us comes to life and starts rolling
around the unpredictable fruits of our hymns
until it is sculptured by our sleep-walking cult
into the immaculate shape of Lord Jagannath
and our palms join together devourly for obeissance.

STERN STEPS

Those who live among us are the dead ones
who used to read *The Mahabharata* or *The Ramayana*
each evening in the days of their bitter autumn.
The days of their spring were dry and tacit
making them feel they were living

inside the sties of their bodies.
The summer rose in them
with all its heats of despair.
The rain struck their ears dumb
with its nights of crickets.
Now they, mute in their earth,
often rise with a chorus
that we have forgotten since long.
With our one foot on their graves
and the other one in the air, invalid,
we prefer to be parasites and worms on the storms
we who indulge in ancestry and myth
we who are ensnared by verbs of inaction
we who turn upon the doors that bear the signs of *Rs.*
Living away from parents and home
and from a language-- Oriya, in my case—with which we were born
we have hung ourselves on
as the pieces of meat from the hooks of the butchers.

STREWN STEPS

Navigate us in the way we like,
forgive us, my dear ones, dead ones, curse us,
who for some two hundred years or so
have drifted away from our mother tongues;
curse upon me rain and wind and sun and disease,
strangle my writing, to bleed me dark blood —
the colour of my skin and conscience.

I do not know when you become
the stone of my worship
or the tattoo on my night,
or the night percolating the closed chapters
of our opaque history.

STEPS SEED

The mute sculptures on the Sun Temple of Konarka,
I seek succour in your drifting shadow;
step you down from your height of sun to sand,
salvage our mute lips sinking

into the abyss of shuffling waves,
sculpture us on the stones of your shape.

O, silent forefathers, give us an appropriate expression
in a language which you had not known;
the clarity of thought at the sight of dark clouds, O, Kalidas;
in each one's lifetime, even sometimes in history,
a cold touch of the Himalayas comes once, at least,
and ours is that history; we are its unnoticed victims.
Your shifting clouds are now constrained
as our tongues are, as our reticent women are,
unload my nameless soul crowned with the tired feathers
of Siberian birds migrating to Chilika, each winter;
the feathers of those birds in Assam, committing mass suicide
each year.

If sometimes I am what I always prefer to be
sometimes I am also the other
language that teaches me the ways
to go without naming the objects, emotions and senses;
that teachers me when to shout, when to bite,
when to recite the names I have known before,
when to speak softly, when to speak without keep speaking.

STEPPING INTO THE SHOES OF GANGADHAR MEHER

We are unprotected species like happiness, like love, like dialects.
My beloved poet and patriot, late Gangadhar Meher,
I remember your words
of pre-Independence era :
"In One's motherland, mother-tongue
if one has no love
how can you consider one wise?
If so, where shall the wisemen go?"
I respect your words, but I have no words; I apologise.
In my tongue I have begun to develop as a stubborn bone.
You were the brewing storm in the pairs of India's timid eyes
that burst out in 1947
and we are the silence succeeding your loud dreams :
We have no blood to shed

and our eyes are dried seas
on whose corrugated shores now there are only whining pines.
The storm went past our coast, swift though, and as it must,
it's only the ravages that's always left behind for us.
And we have passed ourselves from hands to hands as coins
as we have already done to our history, land and language
knowing that our tongues lie paralysed like boas
in the wintry fields of ripe rice in our mouths
and vague efforts to get ourselves back
into our sure lean-toes and your shoes
for we are in the trap of a language
which traps us in an intricate embrace of the game
that once we played in the rain, and now we have forgotten.

SNAPPED STEPS

Now we are no more than the relics of those words
who could not come out without subterfuges :
now we are those words who at each rich pause feel censored,
who at each moment fall like pollen
from the anthers of an orphan's life
we are in love of a language
which does not come to our rescue when our lips falter
before our parents to relate them of our sullen woes.
Even the facts of little buds of lives
dealt with the wild deaths
in the blasted Air India Jumbo Jet over the Atlantic
do not push them into the independent shreds
of two hundred and six pieces of bones or into dyspnoea
since they do not choke with an emotional ague,
since they do not quiver at the jerk of death
lying crumpled inside their aging skins' scaffolds.
A conscientious deity
at the corrosive skirt of their village
protects them all the time, and us, their children
from the inroad of epidemics and rhetorics.
That we are the rats inside the drum, we know,
also we know we do not have teeth and claw.
And if we fail to communicate
with our parents, with our relations, immediate and past,

and if life, if living, if speaking, if writing
is all rust on the iron of our spiky lives
all dust, all egg-shells, all turds of our borrowed words
then, we are the ones disowned, forgotten, almost extinct.

STEPS SWORN

Raze our city to a shack of stones
where ancestral gods are hanging haphazardly
like pigeons those who sometimes disturb
their otherwise undisturbed silence in the abandoned shrines
with their occasional flutters.
And the urchins and the orphans passing by the gods'
indifference whose each step takes them
from one nameless solitude to another nameless solitude
no more consider the Gods godly.
And the cows standing on the middle of the road
forgetful of the vehicles passing by their either sides
like unseen knives in the hands of the butchers
no more consider themselves sacred.

Beside the road open drainages,
on the road open wounds of pavement souls
and open secrets
of the scandalous affairs of women-in-service
allure the road of a people's conscience
into the black holes of everybody's moons.
and the gods, frightened are on wake to take
their flight to the Himalayas, their ancient abode.
And when an untimely monsoon sets
over our body-coloured paddy field
something within us begins to bleed,
something like tears from our eyes of love
and what words cannot explain silence can,
what silence cannot explain tears can
in our land of erratic rain.

STEP SEEK SUCCOR

My history is still lying shapeless like water,
lying indecipherable on the corrosive inscriptions
on the rocks and in the caves left to the anosmiac sun.
Mine is a history of storm, drought and flood.
Never since fifteenth century, since the arrival of Chaitanya,
with his cult of complete surrender to God,
has a major war rocked our vertebraes.
I do not remember if any of my co-poets
has committed suicide,
or ever walked over to the gallows of history.
Only a wound in the air keeps aggravating.

I am a mute rock obstructing nothing.
My root is my rock, my rock root.
Beneath the rock lie the yellowing bones
that could not find a ritual funeral
And standing on the same rock
I shout to the deaf and dumb, oppressive clouds
to go drifting over the peak of my tongue
wetting it with a feeling of cotyledon.

SHRIKANT R. TAMBE

POEMS

I

Old, familiar grounds
Trodden after decades
Seem removed from memory
Landmarks known having vanished.

Those moving along avenues,
Boulevards, seem to float
In the present, not for them
Burden of the past —

More to them the prospects
Of a freer future,
Happiness uneclipsed,
To such the earth very Eden.

II

I called to her
She heard me
But no response made she.

They called to me
I intended to follow her example
But I could not be like her.

My response —
A complaint and appeal by turn —
Fell on deaf ears.

By this time
All had become like her
Only I guarding
What was left of me.

RAJEEV S. PATKE

CANONS AND CANON-MAKING IN INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

1.1 The relation of canon to historical period

Canons are best seen as necessary evils. In a literary world beset by the clamour of a populous mediocrity, the principle of selection cuts with an elitist edge, making room for the authors and texts that an age would see preserved. It is in this polemic sense that canons embody judgements of value. These judgements direct a prescriptive as well as prospective force against changes in taste, opinion and value. In due course of time however, we are presented with a succession of such canons, each dissembling values denying time. The paradox points to an obvious moral :

> Judgements of value...cannot possibly avoid assumptions about the workings of history.
>
> It seems necessary, therefore, to say something general and elementary about the ways in which history is manipulated in the interests of literary valuation. There seem to be two main ways in which we try to make history manageable for literary purposes: by making canons that are in some sense transhistorical; and by inventing historical periods.
>
> (Kermode 1988 : 108-9)

I wish to examine the dynamics of canon formation in this general perspective, with Indian poetry in English as a specific instance. The usual way of making sense of any such body of writing is to treat it not as a mere sequence in time but as an historical process. The notion of process recognizes change as the effect of a cause which may be located in the literary sensibility of a culture. When a change in literary sensibility is shared by a number of authors, the literary historian can nominalize it as literary period. The concept of period may be open to abuse as mere convenience or as a bed of Procrustean

simplification. But when properly used, it defines the recognition that literary changes of a substantive and irreversible kind have occurred in the process that is literary history. The authors and texts who reflect these changes constitute the canon for that period. Canons are necessarily plural. They are also thoroughly historical, and contingent on the values of specific periods. This notion of canon is to be clearly distinguished from what Kermode refers to as "canons that are in some sense transhistorical", to which I shall return later.

2.1 The Indian literary scene : the poet as anthologist

Turning to the Indian cultural scene, if we examine the polemics and politics underlying the historical process, we see that the management of literary periods has been accompanied by, and is indeed an outcome of, the struggle for power between alternative canons :

> canons are complicit with power; and canons are useful that they enable us to handle otherwise unmanageable in historical deposits.
>
> (Kermode 1988 : 115)

In India, cultural independence has not necessarily followed upon the political independence of 1947. But at least in the field of Indian poetry in English, the 1950s are generally seen to mark the rise of a new kind of writing. This new writing was consolidated slowly by a few individuals in the 1960s; the next decade saw it well established; and it has for some time now been readily available, consolidated, canonized and anthologized. All this has been accomplished by the poets themselves, and for the most part, and curiously enough, in the role of anthologists.

Its double-edged principle of inclusion and exclusion makes the anthology an ideal instrument for canon formation. Every literary culture exhibits in some degree the desire of each generation to put together a set of poetic "touchstones". The poet might seem ideally suited to such a task. But the practice of poetry is an individual pursuit. Poets inevitably read other poets from the perspective of their own practice. When they compile anthologies, it is difficult not to infer their notion of value from

what is chosen and what is kept out. When a whole generation of poets shares the same beliefs, and reflects them in a number of influential anthologies, we see the principle of inclusion work to promote a specific poetics. Concurrently, the principle of exclusion serves to bring about a polemical differentiation of literary history into periods. The contemporary Indian poet has been at work with just such a double-blade, and the canon he has carved out has been gratefully accepted by the academic and the critic.

If we glance at other cultures: in England, while Palgrave retained his popularity well beyond the Victorian period, the polemics of Georgian and Imagist poetry were primarily conducted through anthologies whose principles and canons now wear a distinctly dated, historical look. Subsequent complications by poets have only achieved a kind of notoriety : Yeats and Larkin come obviously to mind. It is in Eliot and Richards, and in Leavis and his *Scrutiny* that a truly significant new canon gets established. In America, there is a slight historical counterpart in the *Spoon River Anthology;* but with the exception of the expatriate Pound, the major poets scarcely lent their names to anthologies at all, leaving the creation and academic absorption of a canon to the New Critic.

The Indian scene is interesting in that it is neither academic nor critic but the poet who has industriously set himself to editing anthologies. The same phenomenon may be at work in all the newer or embattled literary cultures where one might expect the authors to be the ones most concerned with defining values : in South-East Asia, Australia, and also in the recent poetry from Ireland. In the case of India, there have been many complications made by the interested outsider (eg. Gokak, Bandyopadhyay, Dwivedi), but the effective ones are only the ones compiled by the better poets. These reveal a remarkable degree of concurrence in the choice of poets and even poems (cf. King 1987 : 285-88, Chart 3). The consensus is all the more emphatic through its severe principle of exclusion.

Why has the anthology proved the most expedient force for defining canons in India? And why or how have the poets

proved so effective in this work of proscription and prescription? The efficacy of the anthology as an instrument for the dissemination of standards and values is, at least in part, related to the peculiar position occupied by English in India. While ubiquitous and virtually indispensable, it still functions for the majority as a poor second cousin of a language. It is learned mostly through books and bad teachers. Its use is generally stilted in vocabulary and impoverished in idiom, with poor control over expressive nuance, and deprived of a sustaining ambience of natural rhythm.

1. Undeterred by the obvious hazards of putting such meagre command to literary use, the sheer quantity of Indian versifiers and free versifiers threatens to swamp the reader. In this predicament the anthology offers a convenient short-cut.

2. The limits of poetic stamina necessarily dictate a preference for the short poem, which is ideally suited to the narrow confines of the anthology (since very few venture, like Kolatkar, into the long poem).

3. The Indian academic is a culturally derivative and diffident creature outside the already fenced in pastures of English and now American poetry, generally unable or unwilling to venture into the disorienting jungle of Indian verse; the anthology offers obvious creature-comforts.

4. Where few read poetry but other poets, friends (perhaps enemies), and captive students, inclusion in an anthology can be more crucial for status among fellow-practitioners than publishing individual volumes, which signify nothing beyond the willingness to pay for bringing out a book. This status naturally brings with it the promise of eventual recognition abroad, which can then translate itself to academic ingestion at home.

5. The anthology is an attractive solution to the economics of marketing poetry in a relatively poor society inundated by the other mass-media and patronized reluctantly by the educational establishment.

6. The generally modest nature of the talent available hardly needs more space than what an anthology provides.

These are some of the probable explanations for the dominance of the anthology in India. If the academic and the critic have fought shy of basic issues, the poets have been eager, indeed anxious, to compose a canon and make explicit notions of value and period which would otherwise remain obliquities to their practice.

The roll-call of significant anthologists is virtually a roll-call of the more prominent poets today : Saleem Peeradina (1972), Gauri Deshpande (1974), Adil Jussawalla (1974), R. Parthasarathy (1976), Keki N. Daruwalla (1980). There have been many other anthologies, which do not require mention here, because they do not work coherently in any single direction. Their lack of editorial principles is displayed as a capricious taste for the individually interesting poem, line, or image, rather than the significant poet. They dilute the strength of the deserving with the Catholic inclusion of much dubious verse. They either promote canons which do not achieve general recognition (eg. Mallik & Bandopadhyay, 1981); or they form no sort of canon at all, adjuring the very function of the anthology.

In such a context, the polemic role adopted by the writers should be seen as a necessary manoeuvre, undertaken in the spirit of a task better done by poets rather than having it botched by academics, journalists, hacks or busybodies. The trend is a healthy one, and we should hope that it will continue even when the shy or arrogant academic has overcome his reluctance to engage with contemporary writing.

It is of course possible, and even very tempting, to deal directly with alternative canons in terms of specific individuals and anthologies. For the moment, however, I find it useful to continue in a more generalized vein, both in order to disengage issues from personalities, and also to conceptualize these issues in a more comprehensive way.

3.1 Imitation and adaptation : an explanatory model

My first manoeuvre is to stipulate two traits as characteristic of the Indian sensibility : imitativeness and adaptability. I submit

these as typical of the Indian, even if not prerogatively or uniquely so. Some such general set of binary terms is perhaps unavoidable in making sense of the sociology of any post-colonial culture (cf Devy 1983 : 82-3, on the historiography of African and West Indian writing). It is clear that imitation can be the necessary first step toward adaptation and assimilation. But pure imitation is a form of identification with one's model, whereas true adaptation and assimilation recognize the need for differentiation from the model. In this sense adaption should be seen as moving away from pure imitation, and antithetical to it.

My second step is to take the most abstract, axiomatic approach possible to the universals of any literary situation. For all the art-forms there are only four universals. For literature, these may be identified as the text, the writer, the reader, reality, and the medium of language. These universals, and their inter-relations, may be visualized in the form of an explanatory diagram (adapting and modifying M.H. Abrams 1953: 7):

reality reader

text

writer medium

Now if we turn to the tension between imitation and adaptation that I mark as the common or recurrent factor of the postcolonial literary experience, it becomes easier to perceive the extent to which the imitative and the adaptive tendencies imply differing poetics. These, in turn, affect and determine in different ways the set of relationships that I have mapped, between the text and

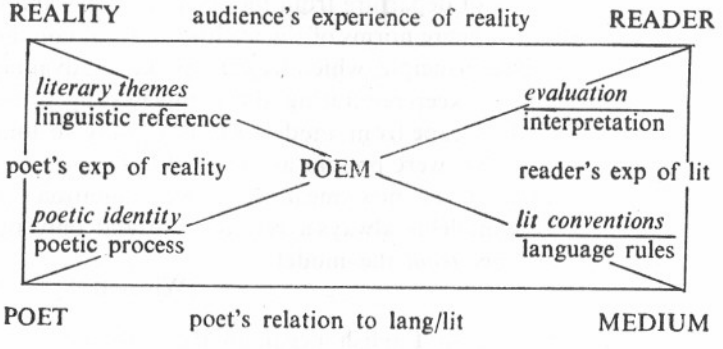
1. the writer, in terms of his sense of literary identity and role;

2. its implied or actual audience;

3. the issues and experiences which are the "subject-matter" of the text, that which it refers to or is in some sense about;

4. the enabling rules of linguistic usage and the literary conventions implicit to the text: the dimensions of sound,

tone, rhythm, metre, rhyme and prosody, as well as diction, syntax, idiom, grammar, style, and the literary semantics of genre :



3.2 The imitative canon of Indian poetry in English

Cultures like those of India, which have been subjugated and ruled over for extended periods, exhibit a long process of involuntary assimilation. The values of such cultures involve a tense cohabitation, in which the ones superimposed or borrowed may dominate over the ones developed indigenously. When the dominant values are embodied in a literary canon, it can become a model for imitation. If we look momentarily and deliberately outside Commonwealth literature, we shall see these general truths exemplified in the ideals of the so-called Neoclassical tradition. English and European literature of the late 17th and the 18th centuries set up a self-conscious and complex set of relationships of dependency on Roman models in its practice of the whole gamut from imitation to adaptation, from pastiche to parody.

In an essay titled "Imitation as Freedom", W. K. Wimsatt asks of these imitations :

> When does this mesothesis of likeness and difference succeed in being a free, original, interesting, genuine and poetic expression?

and his own answer and explication of the oxymoron - imitation as freedom - is cautionary for the tendency to imitate in Indian poetry in English:

> The idea that burlesque and imitation were Augustan avenues of departure from the solemn models and constricting genre norms of the tradition...(is a) commonly received principle, which we can invoke to advantage – if only we keep reiterating the compensating principle that the escape from models *was* fun, only so long as the models were present as fields of reference for the realization of new meanings. An imitation of a classic model is always a reference *to* and only thus a departure *from* the model.
>
> (Wimsatt 1974: 464)

Indian writing in English began in the 19th century in a spirit of complete dependence on the English poetic tradition, and more specifically on the norms and conventions then current : those of English Romanticism and post-Romantic Victorianism. It identified whole-heartedly with those norms and conventions, practising a craft which aimed at being indistinguishable from its model. Consider, for instance, verse like Sarojini Naidu's :

> She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
> She floats like a laugh on the lips of a dream
>
> (in Parthasarathy 1976 : 3)

R. Parthasarathy remarks that "prosodically, her verse is excellent; as poetry, it disappoints", for indeed many a poetaster has done worse, and her lines could serve as a textbook example of efficient if facile anapaests. But it dissembles too sedulously a model which the ironic twist of history has ruled as of very little worth : in this case, Swinburne.

The poet's literary sensibility is adept in reproducing mannerisms of diction and metre and general "poetic" effect, and in that sense, the copying is clever. But it is no way to cope with one's actual context of being, nor with the responsibility and burden of having to be oneself. Unconsciously, it vulgarizes itself before an English audience while patronizing and

insulting the Indian. Swinburne in his time and place may write which way he will. He may even be guilty of occasional self-parody. In the completely different world of experience that is India, for a woman to write as if she were a kind of Swinburne, accidentally transposed to a charming garden from which she is to cull exotica for the English Southern Countries, is to abandon poetry for pastiche, and to be (not the nightingale of India, but) an ostrich in her own sand-plot.

That Swinburne is currently out of fashion is only partly relevant; though it does probably give the lie to Kermode's notion that canons are "in some sense trans-historical", for perhaps they are never really outside history, but only as history dissembles them. The kind of effect created by Sarojini Naidu would remain pastiche even if Swinburne were currently in high critical esteem, as he clearly was in her time. But fashions in India are notoriously slow in their emulation of the West, and poetry is still regarded widely as virtually synonymous with Victorian post-Romanticism. Modernism has had little impact except on the authors of the last two generations. A taste for poetry nurtured on the more imitable aspects of Romanticism finds perfectly acceptable condiments of both Swinburne and Sarojini Naidu.

The real issue lies in the difference between conscious and unconscious parody. An author like Shakespeare could be said to have transcended the vagaries of critical fashion. But Max Beerbohm's "'Savonarola' Brown" still remains a pastiche of Shakespeare (Beerbohm (1917) 1966). The vital difference between the amusement afforded by these two kinds of pastiche is that in dramatizing his imitator Brown, Beerbohm practises the conscious irony of parody, whereas Sarojini Naidu falls victim to the bathos of unconscious travesty. That the reputation of Shakespeare has fared better than Swinburne's, and with a much greater consensus through history, is actually beside the point. The issue is not one of the intrinsic worth of one's models at all, since worth really is relative to history. The style Sarojini Naidu adopts is aimed at expressing an affinity through total stylistic and theoretical identification. This nullifies the scope for adaptation. She not only backed the wrong horse but, within

the same metaphor as it were, she forgot that she was to run herself.

The melancholy truth exemplified in her lines would apply to a large portion of the verse written in India until quite recently. The models change ever so slightly, but always within a decadent post-Romantic canon. Such verse aims at little more than sedulous mimicry. Within the modest confines of its chosen humility, there is limited scope for skill: the prosody may be more or less fluent, the diction more or less vapid or turgid, the syntax more or less copious or stilted, the rhetoric more or less fulsome or flatulent; but the overall derivativeness hardly ever changes. This is the verse of the imitative canon of Indian writing: all the Dutts and the Naidus, and also the Tagores and Aurobindos when they write in English. It is a tradition stultified by its own affectation of fluency.

Too slavish an adherence to the norms and register of a style which belongs most naturally to a different literary context makes the parent culture seem a foster-parent or even a mock-parent. The more completely faithful the feat of stylistic ventriloquism, the more exacting the price paid at all ends of the literary axiom: constrainment of audience; neglect or perversion of the demands of personal experience; an enervated poetic sensibility and identity. In the routine verse of the imitative tradition, prosody and rhetoric, tone and nuance, all find a place; but only as a gigantic and unfunny joke, as an act of brutally insentient misappropriation.

It would be difficult, thought not impossible, to define some redeeming criteria with which to salvage any part of this heavy deposit of history. In its own time, such verse had the novelty and charm of a distinctive and favoured manner of writing applied to a new and for the Westerner an exotic, and for the Indian, a native set of themes, images and topics. The manner underwent little change in adapting itself to new matter. Often the very notion of what should be the subject-matter of such poetry was conditioned by a priori notions of what might interest a patron audience.

The literary historian will continue to find extenuation in the argument that the 19th century Indian poet wrote chiefly for the English reader, and his later counterparts continue to write with an eye to the West, only adding a small like-minded "elite" from within India to their implied audience. However the argument will not rescue this form of imitative dependence from the charge of a snobbery which is venial only because it is so pathetic. In those rare cases where imitation can clear free ground for genuine linguistic and stylistic adaptation, the verse manages to rise above its own self-imposed limits.

3.3 Sincerity and authenticity: the alternative canon

I have been looking so far at how the imitative strain in Indian poetry has suffered for its manner of following its model. But there is yet another dimension to consider : the fate of Indian post-Romanticism is subsumed in the fate of its very model. The forces of canon-making have been revising their view of what Kermode described as the deposits of history. The Western world has seen, through the 19th into the 20th century, a change of culture which is a change of literary sensibility and attitude. Lionel Trilling finds it possible to make sense of this change in a kind of syzygy between *Sincerity and Authenticity*. The struggle for power between these two dominant concepts defines a master-plot for the familial supersession of Romanticism by Modernism. Its history will serve as a virtual allegory for the struggle between alternative canons in Indian poetry in English.

Let me recapitulate some of the essential connotations of the two concepts. Sincerity "refers primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling.... sincerity is the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self" and "the value...attached to the enterprise of sincerity became a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years" (Trilling 1972: 2, 5, 6).

It is precisely this concept of sincerity that we see at work in the verses of Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Tagore and Aurobindo: the canonical writers of the imitative tradition in India. The reputation of this canon has suffered because there has been a

"sharp diminution of the authority" once exercised by the underyling concept. "The devaluation of sincerity is bound up in an essential way with the mystique of the classic literature of our century" (Trilling 1972: 6).

In the case of the Moderns :

> the criterion of sincerity, the calculation of the degree of congruence between feeling and avowal, is not pertinent to the judgement of their work....they figure in our minds exactly as persons, as personalities, of a large exemplary kind, asking, each one of them, what his own self is and whether or not he is being true to it, drawing us to the emulation of their self-scrutiny.
>
> (Trilling 1972 : 7-8)

Turning now to persons and personalities, I remark that in India, and especially for the last two or three decades at least, one individual has been made exactly such a figure of an exemplary kind: Nissim Ezekiel (born 1924). In asking his own self whether or not he is being true to it, he has succeeded, willy-nilly, in drawing younger poets to emulation. His slightly younger contemporary, A.K. Ramanujan (born 1929), from abroad, and the slightly younger Kamala Das (born 1934), from at home, have pursued with an almost obsessive rigour (and varying degrees of success) a similar inquiry into what makes up their true being, and how they might be true to it. The modernist quest for the insecure certainties within selfhood, as exemplified in the Western tradition, has thus found eventual adepts in India.

One of our influential poet-anthologists, Keki Daruwalla, concedes that the language of even his canonical writers "remains a hybrid orchid raised on the mulch of classical dictionaries", and then proceeds to quote from Ramanujan, and from Ezekiel's "Philosophy" :

> The landscscape in its geologic prime
> Dissolves to show its quintessential slime.
> A million stars are blotted out. I think
> Of each historic passion as a blink
> That happened to the sad eye of time.
>
> (in Daruwalla 1980: xxxi)

If we look for the spirit of imitation we shall see it, at the most obvious level, in the metre and the rhymes. In his own way Ezekiel is as good a metrist as Sarojini Naidu. The syntactic role of that "I think" is rather different from what she might have managed, but otherwise, there is at work the same craft that she respected. How then is such poetry different? At what level does imitation move and develop toward adaptation, toward what Wimsatt in his context called "imitation as frequency"?

It is, at least partly, a matter of subtlety and sophistication, of discrimination and nuance in balancing dependence with independence. Not all the verse by Sarojini Naidu or others of her persuasion is as bad as the example I have used, and it is both possible and necessary to perform a careful act of salvaging with the remnants of the imitative tradition, precisely because it is now so hopelessly out of currency (cf Eunice de Souza in Peeradina 1972: 128-9). Ezekiel's kind of verse too has its models, and in that sense, it is still derivative. But a less restricted sense of poetic identity, and a more flexible and discriminating notion of what constitutes adaptation is at work in his poetry. It assimilates its models of metre and tone better. In other words, it replaces the principle of identity and identification with the principle of differentiation. In terms of style and tone it is postlapsarian, and willingly so.

At a more fundamental level, however, the answer must remain a relativist or a purely historical one: the current model is Modernist rather than Victorian. That which the poets think worth striving for – the underlying principle of rhetoric - is no longer sincerity, but authenticity. Trilling explains that

> for the present I can rely on its suggesting a more strenuous moral experience than "sincerity" does, a more exigent concept of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life. At the behest of the criterion of authenticity, much that was once thought to make up the

> very fabric of culture has come to seem of little account, mere fantasy or ritual, or downright falsification.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 11)

It is at an identical behest that the entire fantasy or ritual of Indian post-Romanticism has been put away. In the complicities of power, one of the grimmer ways in which the "otherwise unmanageable deposits of history" (Kermode 1988: 109) get handled is as debris.

In contrast, it is the individual with finger alert on the pulse of authenticity who most completely fits Trilling's description of the modern canonical writer and "his increasing concern with the actual, with the substance of life in all its ordinariness and lack of elevation":

> To emphasize the intractable material necessity of common life and what this implies of life's wonderlessness is to make all the more wonderful such moments of transcendence as may now and then occur. This, it will be recognized, is the basis of Joyce's conception of the "epiphany", literally a "showing forth". The assumption of the epiphany is that human existence is in largest part compounded of the dullness and triviality of its routine, devitalized or paralysed by habit and the weight of necessity, and that what is occasionally shown forth, although it is not divinity as the traditional Christian meaning of the word would propose, is nevertheless appropriate to the idea of divinity: it is what we call spirit. Often what is disclosed is spirit in its very negation, as it has been diminished and immobilized by daily life.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 89)

The transcendence that Trilling talks of is particularly difficult to earn in India, where the factors of daily living which diminish and immobilize are perhaps even more insidious than elsewhere. But when poets do struggle long and hard with these intractable factors, we get a poetry which is rooted in and grows out of these realities in a way that does not generally happen with Sarojini Naidu or Toru Dutt. The very notion of what might

be the realities of life in India now is conditioned by such verse. The new notion of "real" or "relevant" questions the older vision, negates it as blinkered and blurred.

The reverse might very well be possible in an hypothetical sense, but such a possibility has little real consequence, because time and history function like a one-way of no return. Once criteria of authenticity have become established, sincerity can no longer continue to function oblivious of the change which has overtaken it. Yet there are many literary individuals in India who still subscribe to what one might term the fallacy of anachronistic canons, denying that the notion of realism now established renders the old "realities" obsolete. They might do well to reflect on the history of American poetry, where the Longfellows, once overtaken by the Whitmans, have had to call it a day for ever since. Once the hothouse roof is gone, it is no use cherishing the orchids, for the weeds must take over ("as persistent and poetic/ as the grass that grows/ between Bombay's pavement tiles", Ezekiel, *Collected Poems*, 1989, last lines). It is in this context that we must regard the alternative canon of Indian poetry:

1. Unsuitable for song as well as sense
the island flowers into slums
and skyscrapers, reflecting
precisely the growth of my mind.
I am here to find my way in it....

How delight the soul with absolute
sense of salvation, how
hold to a single willed direction?
I was born here and belong.

2. I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

(Nissim Ezekiel, in Peeradina 1972: 7)

It need not be supposed that this modernist commitment to the sheer ugliness or the mere ordinariness of the quotation is necessarily remote from Romanticism. When pursued too hotly, as for instance, by the many Bombay imitators of Ezekiel, it can become tiresome: no less an unconscious mockery of its own model than Sarojini Naidu in her worst moments was of hers. But when truly epiphanic, the poetic insight, in its "sudden disclosure transfigures the dull and ordinary, suffusing it with significance" (Trilling 1972: 89). Trilling is careful in showing us how the archetypal modern epiphany, the heart of modern poetics, is not far removed from at least one of the two kinds of epiphany in Wordsworth, the sort which

> has as its locus and agent some unlikely person - a leech-gatherer, a bereft and deserted woman, an old man on the road - who, without intention, by something said or done, or not done, suddenly manifests the quality of his own particular being and thus implies the wonder of being in general....Lowness of social station, lowness even in a biological sense, is a necessary condition of the persons who provide Wordsworth's epiphanies....We wonder, indeed, whether people as marginal to developed life as these can be thought to partake of full humanity; yet this is of course why Wordsworth has chosen them, for what epiphanies disclose is that these persons forcibly exist as human beings.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 91)

Now consider how this offers a new perspective on all the ancestral figures invoked and exorcized with such an unrelenting passion in Ramanujan's poetry. It also places in a new light the engagingly misshapen figures of Ezekiel's poems in Indian English: say his well-wisher of Miss Pushpa, or the completely total teetotaller. Confronted with the response "Those seem to be accurate observations. There is no malice in them", Ezekiel has said: "There may even be a streak of malice, I don't know. I would not defend myself against it. I would say that there is a faithfulness of temperament" (Ezekiel 1987: 130).

We are familiar with the effect, in these poems, of a different kind of imitation: socio-linguistic mimicry. The dramatis personae offer themselves in self-caricature: their uncouth vocabulary and mangled syntax, their outrageously funny but obviously sincere sentiments are set down for us to recognize as truly authentic. The poems work at an obvious level of parody that has the literary nationalistic in a fury. But as a kind of secret sharing, the satire can have even its Indian butt sniggering in fascinated self-recognition. But with a force subsuming these, the poems also move the reader to an epiphany: of the inglorious but forcible truth about how meaning and significance inhere, for contemporary India, somewhere in the tragi-comic mismatch between human language and human being. The effect is to aesthetize the mundane, the comic, the ugly, and the ridiculous. That is, to make it authentic.

Daruwalla's canonical sample from Ramanujan confirms the transfiguration from his perspective:

> I smell upon this twisted
> blackbone tree the silk and white
> petal of my mother's youth.
> From her earrings three diamonds
> splash a handful of needles.
>
> (Daruwalla 1980: xxxi)

So do the agonistic poems of Kamala Das, of whom R. Parthasarathy says, "The despair is infectious" (Parthasarathy 1976: 22), although it is not clear how we might react to the infection; for authenticity is a blade that cuts two ways:

> Authenicity... is a word of ominous import.... That the word has become a part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence.

Moreover

> authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion, aesthetic opinion in the first instance,

> social and political opinion in the next. One topic of its polemic, which has reference to both aesthetic and social opinion, is the error of the view that beauty is the highest quality to which art may aspire.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 93, 94)

India is an ideal location for a tropology of despair. But "beauty" in some more or less traditional way was precisely what Sarojini Naidu or Toru Dutt were after. Nathalie Sarraute's rejection of Flaubert's Emma has an analogue in the Indian situation: "the inauthenticity of Emma Bovary consists in her using as the stuff of her dreams the 'cheap images drawn from the most debased, discredited forms of romanticism' " (Trilling, 1972: 104). It is precisely these facile, derivative notions that the alternative canon of Indian poetry in English rejects. It replaces them with its own inverted romanticism of the dull, the ugly and the negative. The polemics of authenticity exhibit a remarkable congruence in their pursuit of what might repel the conventional aesthete. This can be sampled at will from the three anthologies instrumental in consolidating the new canon: 1972: Saleem Peeradina; 1976: R. Parthasarathy; and 1980: Keki N. Daruwalla. The choice of subject-matter and the manner of treating it form a virtual archetype through all three anthologies. Consider, in passing, just the titles of some of the most frequently anthologized poems: "The Epilectic", "The Dance of the Eunuchs", "The Freaks", "Madness is a Country", "Migraine", "The Gnomes" (King 1987: 286-88, Chart 3). The choice of subject-matter and the corresponding range of tone, style and rhetoric bespeak a common poetics and a shared notion of poetic role and function. In what it prescribes, the new role and function might well be regarded just as narrow, and in what it proscribes just as sweeping, as the neo-Romantics; the only difference is that the directions have reversed themselves.

Two other poets, or erstwhile poets, P. Lal and Pritish Nandy, have been ubiquitous, tireless and very "visible" as anthologists. But, as Bruce King (and Eunice de Souza before him: Peeradina 1972: 125-29) remarks, "Lal's indiscriminate publication of writers came into conflict with the need to establish standards", that is, the standards of good writing upheld by the

new canon, and pretty much the same objection is taken against Pritish Nandy (King 1987: 73, 63). They fall in between the two traditions by trying to accomodate poets drawn from both; whereas the other three anthologies tacitly recognize the mutually exclusive nature of the two affiliations.

The canon formed by these three poet-anthologists comprises: Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Daruwalla, Arwind Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, R. Parthasarathy, and Arun Kolatkar (cf King 1987: 283, Chart 2). To this two of the three editors add Mahapatra. These nine poets constitute the substantive body of modern Indian poets in English, a corpus to be identified more meaningfully with poets and their shared poetics than simply with poems. To this select group one or the other anthology adds either Adil Jussawalla or Shiv Kumar, and to this future anthologies will no doubt, in time, add other names born after the 1921-1947 span covered by the present lot, or some older poets like Kersy Katrak or G.S. Sharat Chandra (included by Daruwalla in his anthology).

What unites them is in part the principle of negation: the displacement of sincerity is accompanied by a sense of alienation and estrangement from much that is traditional to the thought and religions of Asia and India. Ezekiel would prefer to see it as "a characteristic, rather than a malaise" (Ezekiel 1987 : 135). Consider the ambivalence and "infectious despair" of one of the most well-known of the new canonical poems :

TASTE FOR TOMORROW

At Puri, the crows.
The one wide street
lolls out like a giant tongue.

Five faceless lepers move aside
as a priest passes by.

And at the street's end
the crowds thronging the temple door;
a huge holy flower
swaying in the wind of great reasons.

(Jayanta Mahapatra, in Daruwalla 1980: 120)

Many of the Indian poets do translate, but nevertheless, the literatures in the other Indian languages have not been found a fruitful influence to writing in English. The vernacular literatures themselves are busy absorbing Western influences. Even in the case of the bilingual Kolatkar, as B. Nemade (1985) has remarked, it is not clear what his English poems do that is not done better in the Marathi. In a positive light, what unites the new canon is the affiliation to a poetics of authenticity, and a general amenability to influences from Western Modernism and its sequels. Ezekiel's poetry practises principles not far removed from the Movement poets in England; and readers familiar with the Confessional examples of Lowell and Plath in America can enter the personal quests of Ramanujan and Kamala Das with ready recognition. Impressionism, Expressionism and Surrealism are more obviously at work in Kolatkar and Mehrotra than Tukaram or Kabir.

So long as the criteria and norms of the authenticist tradition continue to dominate, this canon will rule. But if the complicities of power displace or replace authenticity with some old or new principle, the more mechanical and glib parts of this canon too will become a deposit of history. This is as inevitable and no less paradoxical than that the "canon" of English poetry coopts without coercion the poems of a neoclassical poetics alongside the Wordsworth who explicitly rejected it.

4.1 "Transhistorical" canons and the role of the anthologist

The most interesting questions raised by this spectacle of the supersession of canons are the whether and the how of what Kermode calls "transhistorical" canons. Is there really any such thing as the true transcendence of history? Samuel Johnson clearly thought so when he announced with suitable aplomb that Shakespeare, in the eighteenth century, was finally ready

> to assume the dignity of an ancient and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration.
>
> (Johnson (1765) 1969: 58)

One may conclude then that an author is acknowledged as admissible into a privileged, transhistorical canon if two and

more periods, each distinct from the other, find common value in the author. Such authors may share with Robert Graves a hearty contempt for all who evoke posterity. Nevertheless, such authors are the proof that there can be any common ground at all between the values and ideals of differing periods of literary culture. That this is possible is the only reason why any part of the past retains relevance for posterity. Transhistorical canons are thus the highest common factor between historical canons. But they are constantly being confused with the more ubiquitous sort of historical canon. All the general anthologies of poetry implicitly claim an identical transhistorical status for their canons. A good part of college and university teaching in the humanities treats the curriculum of primary texts as a "transhistorical" canon, even when the methods of study recommended are historical, and the processes by which authors are let in or kept out are part of the polemics and politics of historical canons. After all, only a few are predestined for the election to transhistory. The longer a text retains a place in such a canon, the less the taint of history, and the more concealed the polemics which enabled it to enter the historical canon in the first place.

The present focus is on India in a temporal or diachronic perspective. If, for a moment, we move synchronously in geography, the cutting edge of the canonical scythe retains all its transhistorical and neo-Calvinist elitism: for instance, D.J. Enright's *Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse* (1980) admits only Ramanujan into his canon, while B. Nemade has long been asking why the nightingales of India do not get the place of even crows in such anthologies. But then Sarojini Naidu would not gain admittance to an authenticist canon even within India. So perhaps the reason has to do with *when* a canon is being formed, rather than *where* or *by whom*.

We have seen that the poet's politics of contemporary India reflects in its polemics a much larger rejection of the canon of sincerity. When a dependent literary culture breaks its historical process into two mutually hostile periods, there cannot be the common thread required for a transhistorical reliquary. The tension between plural canons can be sustained in meaningful debate only as oxymoron: two alternatives in a historical com-

posite, whose claims to transhistory must yet wait on the ratification of succeeding periods. This might seem no better than the lame statistical crutch of consensus and longevity. But then, neither Samuel Johnson nor Frank Kermode base their notions of transhistory on anything other or better.

That is not to deny a use to anthologies. But the only appropriate one for the time is one that will admit an historical awareness of period directly into its organization. Since the authenticist canon follows upon and displaces the imitative one, such an anthology would define chronology into two periods. This division would reflect the corollary to Kermode's axiom, that canons themselves constitute historical period. Such an anthology would raise and attempt to settle the question of what is adaptive within the imitative framework, to correspond to the freedom achieved by the authenticist.

The efforts of Lal and Nandy did not represent this kind of anthology because they were far too catholic and indiscriminate and because they recognized no such period distinctions. Gokak's Sahitya Akademi collection does follow chronology (as does Dwivedi) but only in the sense of naive sequence, with no real attempt at defining a sense of historical period, and with little awareness of the implications of plural canons. These anthologists are much more comfortable with Tagore and Aurobindo than, say, Ramanujan or Kamala Das. There is little awareness of the irony inherent in quoting with gratification A. Norman Jeffares' praise of Aurobindo as "the greatest Commonwealth poet of the 19th century" (Gokak 1983: xxxvii), and yet going on to include poets completely at odds with the practice of Aurobindo. Likewise, Dwivedi is innocuously naive in reporting that "During the fifties.... a definitive movement (arose) which was not restricted by a specific infrastructure of values or ideological considerations" (Dwivedi 1980: 32). Gokak is only slightly better, conceding that "A particular verbal mode of expressing romantic sensibility may have ended with Sarojini Naidu and her generation", but then misses the whole point of this historical perception by claiming that "it does not mean that romantic sensibilty itself came to an end with her" (Gokak 1983: xxxvi-xxxvii).

He wants to keep his cake and yet has it spat on too. Opposing and mutually hostile poetics are made to lie side by side, uneasy bed-fellows unwillingly sharing the sheets of the same book. The coercion ought to fill the anthologist with unease and anxiety. Any such meaningful compilation would have to be much more explicit and cogent than Gokak's work about the criteria of transhistoricity. Alternatively, it ought to have adopted a pragmatically historicist approach, arguing for each of the two canons as valid for its time and age, although placed by historical process and sequence in a spirit of opposition and mutual exclusiveness, presenting them together as part of a historical dialectics rather than mere sequence and accident. Of all such miscellanies one can only say in exasperated malapropism:

> Reason, in itself confounded,
> Saw division grow together,
> To themselves yet either neither,
> Simple were so well compounded.
>
> ("The Phoenix and Turtle")

However, the attempt by Lal to provide some kind of a context for his poems is worth taking several steps further. It is a pity that his notion of help is limited to tiny photographs and wordy credos. Eunice de Souza is no doubt justified in her dismissal of all this as *frou frou* (Peeradina 1972: 126). But an editorial apparatus of information and sources, comments, insights, interviews and other related primary as well as secondary material, when selected and presented with a due respect to the text, could provide an enhancing–and not at all insubordinatory or irrelevant–context. It would also place the two alternative canons in their true antithetical relation, providing for the present time the materials for a debate which is otherwise resolved out of hand in the false favour of this or that canon, in a hasty effort to preempt posterity. John Press, in his *Map of Modern Verse*, and Geoffrey Summerfield, in his Penguin collection of contemporary poets, *Worlds*, are instances of what I have in mind in terms of the kind of enhancing ambience a good anthology can create around its poems. Where the poets have done their work as anthologists – while Ezekiel or Ramanujan or Mahapatra can be persuaded to give us *their* anthologies – it is perhaps time

now to call for a canonical stand-off, or perhaps, double bluff. Anthologies, after all, are necessary evils.

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JOHN ALTER

WINDOWS

What other time? Now
beckons. You depart. O,
things cry out. Sweaters
& jackets weep. House laments.
Telephone wails. "You are
our center, our
root, our
bright light!"

Lonely mirrors mourn.
It is no mystery, this detour of
things

but the voice calls
like a clear window
of secret glass.

2.

There,
you & I are one.
It is no accident,
this joy we impart to
each other today, but spills into
today's particular bowl

as if the text & the day
spoke together at once calling
each other again & again to leave
behind door, windows,
jackets & sweaters
& come back
to the earliest place of
confrontation.

A MISREADING AT 31,000 FEET

Flying West
over a tundra of clouds
landlocked amphibian
becomes an eagle,

or Icarus,
for a moment defies gravity,
leaves beneath him
his earth-bound destiny—

Or,
carried like a fool
on another's wings,
dances
irony's belated jig
here in this sublimation.

LOOSE CHANGE

Change
is an embrace, an act of
love. You can't change me other-
wise.

I sit in this room thinking
I need to change. "Without love,
fat chance buddy!"
It is early summer. Apricots

where bare
branches, blossoms, the tenderest green
once flourished. And irises
short-changing nobody.

In the garden, no flower sits
thinking, Today I need to change myself.

*

In the garden there are no
old flowers. On my table, wilting
the irises.

LOOK AWAY

I am caught by poetry
in strange places, like today.

Today is strange,

I was eating my toast and
the black coffee and
on the ridges of the mountains
in whose cafe I lingered, forests blazed,

oak,
all the wild roses, the irises, daisies
burned, flambee. I would like to name them for you,
how each became an offering,

in small breath-
less lines like a man has when he has climbed
this far, & the wind puts one kind hand
on your shoulder then, tugging your mind away.

Prayer flags flap & flutter.

Today alliterates, it is strange, it is like
the first touch of that stranger whose love will burn
your dry undergrowth away,

it came bursting out of last night's
cool dark dream.

A truck roars past me. The dust settles.
I am on a new road. These
bits. This
shy, the clock winding me up. Do you
catch my breath?

II.

Who is in the truck?
There is a troubador today, he came
when the stars were arranging themselves
above our sleeping heads. For him,

life really is
a dance, he knows his way by
the next step. His long hair is burning.

III.

Fire
in the alchemical forest. Charred mushrooms.
When he leans his head out over the steaming ravines
birds complain that the heat and the ashes of
green are clogging their madrigals.
It is not pleasant. Roasted rhododendron.

Somberly, to chew toast,
skim off the layer of ashes from my
black coffee & think and think that
today is always, it renews itself
in strangeness, with strangers.

IV.

And the distractions,
the long dead-ends, the green hills into which
his shoes wander,
each as (_____fill in the blank)
as a book you read when
all else fails. An alibi : "I was reading

this book,"
to open whose pages is to be detoured
immediately from that progressive direction.
On this green hill, in the shade
of this tree, to sit with the sun open
on your lap and your shadow asleep,

the word dormant
conjugating beside you, is surely bliss—
the mountains learning to walk,
the steep exuberant valleys,
your mind flapping its wings—
Somebody says, Ah!

V.

It is today.
You are there only now scrambling up
the rocky slope, & I am here,
a few crumbs in my beard, flames threatening
to write their own kind of poem
on the margins of my love.

MOTHER'S DAY

Your mother is
dying,

she wears her body like an old coat
these days,
with empty pockets
and brittle and stiff are her bones,
no dancing you old grey mare
no dancing!

no meals cooking in this kitchen

casts a diminishing shadow,

writes letters that only love can read
anymore, fingers scurrying
blindly across the deserted pages

goes inside
goes away it's like
you're in a car going away from a porch
on which in the rocking chair she sits who
once drove the damned thing
herself,

waving
and the house recedes
and she is less solid now than the furniture
the bed on which for god's sake
goodbye to it all good
riddance

where does that leave you?
In what driver's seat?
Are there books for the dead to read?
Oh my son beware the rear-view mirror!

In this new light
to sit down and think
your mother is
dying.

—May 7, 1989

S. K. DESAI

THE PILGRIMAGE

We set out in the early hours
Of the morning when it was still dark,
The more religious on foot and the more cautious
In 'do:lis', each carried by two expert walkers,
More curious than religious, bleary-eyed, I sat
In a 'do:li' like a Veerashaiva corpse, wrapped
In woollens, mummified. It was a pilgrimage
To Sammeda Shikharji – a fond dream of the pious
To bow down to the 'padukas' of the twenty-four
Tiruthankars hidden among the hills of Bhihar.
My grandmother had planted the dream in my
Childish brain, now grown into a tree of unfaith.
Shikharaji I always wanted to climb to kill
The giant on the beanstalk. The doli-carriers
Sang unintelligible folk songs for extra money.
Women, eager to earn 'punya' for twenty life-times,
Walked bare-foot, crying 'Jai Parshwanathji!'

As the morning birds twittered I heard
The sound of the water-fall in the darkness
Of my soul, and the sun took a long time
To rise. Climbing, climbing we reached
At last the top, with the do:li-carriers panting
For breath, the sun bathing the mountains
And the valleys in his fantastic gold.

The 'Padukas' were a disappointment, so were
The little childish shrines where rich women had left
Silver 'aaraties', in my dream each mountain-top
Being topped by an angelic temple rising to the heavens.

We walked up and down, visiting the shrines, came
At last to the proper temple among the waters, ate
Our breakfast among unknown people chirping like birds.
We again set out, now to the highest mountain-
Top, the shrine of Parshwanath, one who really lived
Centuries ago, died a real death in the cave beneath
The shrine. Did he attain real *nirvana*, by the way?
Who knows what he attained? But sitting there
At the top of the stairs and looking round at hills
Beyond the hills and valleys beyond valleys, I felt
For a moment, 'What else is *Mukti?*'
To be liberated is to be among the clouds,
With the earth falling away like your *Karma*,
Down to the sunless sea.

There was no revelation, no understanding,
But just a feeling of peace or the possibility
Of peace—until I saw an aeroplane
Flying over the clouds with the sound of a waterfall.
I climbed down with the shadows lengthening
Into a menace, with every limb becoming
A stranger to my body in aching tiredness.

Bliss was it when the soft hands
Of a professional masseur put my limbs
Together with gentle skill. Suddenly
The pilgrimage was over, with a long line
Of arms neutrally stretched for pious alms.

[*Translated from the Kannada by the poet*]

GANDHI

A dot for a nose, a pair of peering spectacles
A curved line for the head, a question mark —
The lips, the artist's despair, missing,
With the smile that cheered the millions.

Memory has simplified him, deified him
He is now a god to be hung in a posh drawing room,
Or a statue standing alone in public squares.
Sometimes I fear that the long rod in his hand
Might turn into a whip lashing the Philistines,
With glistening Gandhi-caps....

Gandhi, you never had a Gandhi-cap on, did you?
You walked half-naked, bare-headed, among the wolves,
Crying: Peace for the sake of Ram and Alla —
Till one tore out the name of'Ram' from your flesh
To be carved on a black stone in Rajghat.

You knew the answer for the ills of the world —
Ahimsa, Brahmacharya: self-imposed impotence,
So that man doesn't father sin.
But how did you fight for freedom, you,
Secret war-mongerer, rabble-rouser, hurling
People into the waves of violence? You knew
You had to fight for peace — die for life....
Live — a long life O Mahatma! Jai!

[*Translated from the Kannada by the poet*]

NIRMALA PILLAI

REFLECTIONS

And when the little light that's left
in my grey-washed eyes drip,
drop by drop over the rocky face
of day, I bend more closer
to see it congealed hard
reflecting a wailing mirror to my fate.

And when the humans give no more
turn to woods and animals for solace
the curling ashes of my incense stick
follow the call of the footless winds
They only whisper, but carry away
the leaves in their autumnal hands.

And that I watch in mute sorrow
my late buds brown and fall without flowering
leaving the branches to bare their hunger
finger the empty sky in renewed hope
to scrape a few cloudy dreams
to green again their rustling tresses.

And then the music winnows out of earth
Roots sucking up the promises of her sleep
the warmth left in my fisted palm seeps
away into the sunlit sky breaking fingers
the night eyes lights up with the meaning
of my cold stiff corpse without pain.

SUKRITA P. KUMAR

DUSKS AND DAWNS

Through the fading
blue of the sky
the mountains
flap their tongues
gently against the
clouds,
opening their cracking lips
to inhale
the gold, the red and
the saffron of the
setting sun;

Himalayas,
the flushed sages
vibrant and impassioned
fed on the glory of
a million setting suns,
melt into mountain waves;

Pink oaks and pink pines
blink through the
shimmering veil
of the blushing twilight,
sending signals of
time and birth.

PRAYERS

Ringing echoes,
ushering gods
into the
valleys;

Temple bells,
ushering
men
into the
temples.

LANDSCAPE

With goats
grazing
on its chest,

the mountain
is a captive
beneath
criss cross
paths.

KUSUMAGRAJA

(VI. WA. SHIRWADKAR)

COLOUR

The rose never understood
Such a red colour
As I once saw on your palm

The sky had never found
Such a red colour
As I once saw on your cheek

The *Palas* could never have imagined
Such a red colour
As I once saw on your bosom

The funeral pyre also would not have relished
Such a red colour
As I saw in the end by way of parting
In your eyes.

WARILY

Here spilt
Hemlock in Socrates' cup
Sprinkled compassionate tears
In the eyes of Gautam and Gandhi.
The Cross poured on this ground
Christ's blood.
Traveller, tread warily
In this mire.

[*Translated from the Marathi by Shrikant R. Tambe*]

MAKARAND PARANJAPE

REVIEW

Indian Clerihews by Emken. Calcutta, Writers Workshop, 1989. 31 pp.

Emken is the *nom de plume* of Professor M. K. Naik, one of the leading critics of India. He has had a long and distinguished career as a scholar-teacher: as the senior professor and Head of the Department of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad, and as the author of eight books and editor of six others, he has established his presence as a leading authority in the field of letters in India. After retiring from regular teaching, Professor Naik has allowed the poet in him to step out of the closet, as it were. And the result is this charming, witty, erudite, and highly entertaining collection of 95 clerihews.

The clerihew is a genre that has few practitioners anywhere, and especially in Indian English poetry. The only other Indian poet that I know of who has written clerihews in recent years is S. Santhi. Santhi's clerihews often have a dense structure and play on words and sounds :

> I like the odour
> Of Dostoevsky (Fyodor)
> Solely because it is vital
> You guessed it, to my title.
>
> (From *Rhyme and Punishment*)

Santhi exploits the "odour" within "Fyodor" for the effect of his poem. Naik's clerihews are more direct, but not the less entertaining:

> Sir Thomas Malory
> Didn't count every calory
> Life in the Middle Ages
> Had its advantages.
>
> (9)

Here's one that I like particularly for its wit :

> The moral of *Paradise Lost*
> Is that an apple cost
> Far more in ancient Eden
> Than in modern Sweden.
>
> (11)

Making "Eden" rhyme with "Sweden" gives the apple a particular connotation which would otherwise have been lost.

Not all of Emken's clerihews are so easy to understand, though. Often they allude to texts or ideas whose knowledge is necessary for their meaning:

> S. T. Coleridge
> Had a tiny fridge
> The body was plastic
> And the condenser esemplastic.
>
> (13)

If Coleridge's having a fridge is incongrous enough, its condenser's being esemplastic is even more startling because it points to *Biographia Literaria* and to Coleridge's theory of the imagination. In light verse such as this it doesn't matter how the body of the fridge is plastic while the condenser is esemplastic; the logic of the contrast is not crucial to the effect.

The following clerihew, however, is not only witty, but logical apposite :

> John Keats
> Wasn't much for eats
> But was often seen
> Drinking gallons of Hippocrene.
>
> (14)

Indeed, who would deny that Keats had drunk deeply of the fountain at Mt. Helicon, sacred to the Muses?

The range of Emken's erudition is indeed impressive. Starting with medieval English poets, gradually he moves up to the contemporary period, almost as if he wishes to offer a survey course

in English literature. Besides Malory, Chaucer, Gower, and Shakespeare, he has Milton, Swift, Blake, Scott, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Lamb, Hazlitt, Hunt, Peacock, Landor, Clive, Pitt, Carlyle, Ruskin, Mill, Browning, Dickens, Tennyson, Hardy, Carroll, Pater, Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, Barrie, Kipling, Doyle, Auden, Spender, Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Greene, as subjects for his clerihews. The list is a bit old fashioned and somewhat "weak" on 18th Century literature, but otherwise solid enough. Naik then moves on to American literature, popular culture, Continental literature, Classical literature, before rounding off his collection with clerihews on Gandhi and Nehru:

> Mahatma Gandhi
> Abhorred brandy
> But had no notion
> Of the M-r-r-ji potion.

And,

> Jawaharlal Nehru
> Couldn't find Mount Meru
> Though he'd travelled
> From China to Peru.

(31)

Is the last the unkindest cut of all, implying that Nehru had really missed his salvation? Perhaps it would be better to consider it no more than a glancing touche.

In conclusion, let me recommend this book to students of literature; if nothing else, it'll teach us not to take ourselves and our reading lists so seriously. But be prepared to go to your Oxford companion to tease out some of the trickier allusions contained in these clerihews!

CHARANJIT KAUR

TO PIERCE THE FEMALE DEAD

She will not pass
– Thank God, says her begetters –
from one darkness to another
but lie coiled and still
waiting
for a mere pin-prick
and not even a thread of pain
to be flushed out.
(A woman's first blood
– dead or alive –
is manure for the barren land).
This blood is on no man's head;
just
the sacrificial goat tied to the Pole.

FOR FATHER

The cornered bed in ward 7
still creaks with the breath of the man
dead eight years now.
Perhaps the white-washed walls
conceal the wrinkles of his brow;
the burr of the skeletal fan,
perhaps, is only an echo
of the droplets of ambition
he ravaged in his wide-eyed dreams;
The eyes were stones already
even before he had seen the smile of day.
He died, maybe, even before he could be born,
passing from one anonymity
to another;
the knot of a puerile tragedy
lodged like a grain of sand
insistent, urgent, in the flap of his eye.

EXILE — SELF-IMPOSED

Small forgivenesses and petty mercies
Cannot ferret me out now;
And all the glitterati ranged to win
throw larger shadows in illumined halls.
And some may question, others applaud,
some psychologise, dissect, apologise,
impute motives, exonerate
what to them appears a fault;
and some still may turn a cool, contemptuous eye,
throw in, maybe, a studied indifference.
To me it's all one –
perhaps the after fever taste in the mouth;
I've begun to fear
the indulgent smile of the tyrant, now.

BREAKING-POINT

When you do not know
the end of the blue of the sky,
you wish to pack it
into a neat bundle
and press it into your pocket.
Then you fear
that creases may wrinkle it
beyond recognition.
So that
when you flutter about
to blow it up again,
your heart will break
to see the ant-holes
that have seived it
bare.

N. N. KAKKAD

PORTRAIT OF A PIG

(N. N. Kakkad was born in 1927 at Avidanalloor, a village in Kozhikode district in Kerala. After working as a teacher for some time, he joined All India Radio as a script writer. He retired in 1985 as a producer. Kakkad is regarded as one of the pioneers of Modernist poetry in Malayalam. The publication of his "Echoes of Hell" (*Pathalathinte Muzhakkam*) in 1960 marked a turning point in Malayalam poetry. Unlike many other Modernist poets, however, his poetry passed through several phases of development, sometimes reflecting a deep political awareness. "Portrait of a Pig" (1976) belongs to the fag end of his career. His last collection of poems, "The Journey is Done" (*Saphalamee Yatra, 1985*) received the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award. Kakkad died in 1987).

The garbage heap stinks like dead Time as you
Rummage about for leftovers and dirt.
Bolstering your already thick layer of fat
You curl up calmly on the dirty kerb.

Your eyes, two small slits on the crust of muck,
Never bother about what they see
And what they fail to see, while you lie
Like contentment upon a monument.

Who shall not envy the blessings
Dame Luck has showered upon you!

[*Translated from the Malayalam by K. M. Sherrif*]

R. L. COOK

SYMBOL OF PERFECTION

There is a symbol of perfection in the sun
And earth, his shrunken effigy, our home
Spins round him like a drunken bee about
The flower of truth: his honey in our veins
Becomes the wax of evil and encrusts
Earth's surface, covering the crying skulls
That sing, time-wise, from the dark throat of death.
They gleam through tombs, outlast our crumbling walls
Of flesh; they join, not fight, the centuries:
And in the flow of time their wise old dust
Has danced and sung before our sunshot eyes.

THE WITHERING OF DESIRE

I

The raging seed of lust behind his eyes
Grew springing tares along his breeding limbs
Whose strangling stems coiled round his virgin bones
And fired his marrow with their pincer roots.

His hands transformed to leaves, his blood to sap,
His deeds to pollen of that gaudy growth
Which overran the pastures of his youth
And, choking him, forced out his hothouse prime :
While in his brain the fretful pistils worked
To fertilise the squalor of his days.

II

But leaves will turn to brown, drop, brittling, down
To scar the golden desert of his life;
And flesh and bones, unpetalled, will display
His autumn shame to watching meadow flowers.

Then he will pluck fresh seeds from his scorched pride
And plant the iron kernel of resolve;
Will know at last the withering of desire
And walk into the forest without fear.

INDIAN BRIDE IN BUCHAN*

Here, on a sullen shore, by a leaden sea,
Her gaze burns eastwards and her sombre eyes
Dredge the horizon where the dull, drained skies
Limit her outer vision: yet, does she,
Darkly aloof, have sight of places far
From this inhospitable, alien coast –
Glimpses of colour, caught then quickly lost,
Jewelled peacocks glittering through the rime and haar?

Her poise is rapt; within she surely finds
Some memory of heat and light, unknown
To this harsh landscape with its heart of stone.
Though slate-cold spray and screening drizzle blinds
Her brooding eyes, they hold a lambent gleam,
The index to her inner world of dream.

**"Buchan" is a geographical area in the North-East of Scotland (including much of the Country of Aberdeenshire)*

line 8 : "rime" = frost; "haar" = sea-mist

RANA NAYAR

MY STREET, MY PEOPLE

I live
at the wrong end of my street
where two wrongs
always make a right
where brain-cells
dimly float in the open drains
where rain never pours
eyes do
where sun never blazes
women do
where light never fails
children often do
All forward-looking people
we never look back
like brinded cows
leaping over barbed wires.
Last night
when I heard a nuclear explosion
in my neighbour's kitchen
I was sure
His son was bringing home
a new century
wheeling astern
his rickety, old horse-cart.

RAMA R. RAO

BRAHMIN

"A *brahmin* is one who knows the *Brahma*,
Say the *Vedas*," he drones,
Six strands of holy thread tied into a *Brahma*-knot
Dangling diagonally down the brown belly weighted to the ground
Squatted on the patient floor he chants
The *Vedic* hymns in a language he no longer knows.
More sound than sense; mind greedy for gold,
Clogged with lust for the firm full-breasted
Shudra maid sweeping his floor for rupees.
Reverberating sounds rise aloft
From the musty,brittle, yellow page:
"Free the bird caged in by the senses; the bird is *Brahma*."
Mouth waters at the pungent aroma
Of saffron-and-cardamom wafted in the wind
From a kitchen across the street
While the mind plays tricks with the *Shudra* maid.

THE CHEF

The clay cauldron earth
Over a tripod
Of rough-hewn boulders
Of past, present, and future
Under the blue lid
Of the canopied sky;

Fire fed by the sun,
Kindled and stoked
By faggots of day and night;
With the laddle of spring, summer,
Autumn and winter
To stir the stew,

The busy master chef,
Mr. Time, tirelessly cooks.

A WELL-MEANING MISSIONARY IN INDIA

In his zeal
To spread his faith
The redman opened
The doors of a school house
To the five year old
Brown boys and girls –
Hoping to catch them
When they were still young
To save their little souls
From what he called
Centuries-old ignorance.

A chubby brown child
With grape-dark eyes
Gleefully colors
The outline of Christ
In dark-blue crayon,
Making him look
Like the dark god
Krishna in his home.

Horrified,
The missionary
Puts away blue crayons
From every box.

Now, at coloring time,
The children are lost:
They cannot paint
The sky or the ocean.
They wonder
Which stick of crayon
To pick
To complete the rainbow.

CON MAN, FRIEND

Con man, butter thief,
Breaker of maidens' hearts!

29 beauties bathing in the brook
Oblivious to your tricks
Of hiding their cast out clothes
To tease and see redness
Ripen on their cheeks.

Beauty queen to arbitrate
Cousins feuding over
Life's elixir –
The fruit of churned seas.
Lured both friend and foe
To your eye-catching body curves –
Cheating the foes by denying them
The ambrosia you gave your friends.

Beggar dwarf to trick the demon king
Who gave you ground for three steps
You asked for.
By one sweep you measured the heaven
And covered the land by another
Not having the space for the third,
The king received your foot
On his head.

Con man, butter-thief, liar, beggar –
But always a friend to your friends.
By fair means or foul
By hook or by crook,
You stand by your men.

Make me your friend,
Lord of the Seven Hills,
For I shall not bear
Your wrath as a foe.

THE MOUTH

No, I shrieked in panic,
Take the pebble out
of your mouth.
Do you have
Rocks for brains
To eat a rock?
Don't you know any better?
Open your
Butter-smeared mouth
Before the nugget of stone
Lodges in your throat!

What? A miracle!
I see the sky,
The earth encircled
By seven seas,
The galaxies cradling
The nine planets
The universe compacted
In the narrow cavity
Of your mouth!

I thought
You were only a child,
O Lord of Seven Hills,
In my human ignorance.

M. V. SATHYAN

ZERO EQUATIONS

I woke up
Before daybreak.
The chill air
The fragrance of the parijata flower
The freshness of a child's mind.

Once
Here
In the plains of the deep dream
In the caves untouched by the sun
I
A bat
Upside down;
A sparrow
Living in a nest
Built of hay and twigs;
A sand particle
Timeless
Spaceless
Nameless.

I am the brain-storm
That led Siddharta to Enlightenment
Van Gogh to the madhouse
Einstein to Relativity.

I wander along the seacoast
Conceiving a child's thoughts
Painting pictures
Incomprehensible to all,
Lying flat on my back
— Sand and sweat smarting it –
Searching for
And gazing at the constellations,
Hating and avoiding the memory shrubs
That lacerate me on my way.
The path ahead of me forks

With the precision
Of a Mozart violin sonata.

The sapling
In the hug of the polythene bag
Breathes a new day.
I rush again
To the slopes
Of the flower-beds.

[*Translated from the Tamil by M. S. Ramaswamy*]

RABINDRA K. SWAIN

AGING : AN ORDEAL

Burden of Waves and Fruit by Jayanta Mahapatra. Washington, D.C., Three Continents Press, 1988. 59 pp.

Jayanta Mahapatra is aging. He is past sixty. It is but natural that he should be writing more and more about aging which is becoming an ordeal to him :

> I touch my shoulders; they are bare, contrite.
> Like the shape of a deserted park bench in the rain.
> ("Waiting")

The shoulders are "contrite"; they are "bare" "like a deserted park bench in the rain". These shoulders are of an aging body. The old age to Shakespeare was "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" ("Sonnet LXXIII"). The signs of aging on the poet's body are conspicuous, but "contrite". One acquainted with his diction would be struck by the word "shoulders". Instead, perhaps, the word "heart" would have been here. Essentially, Mahapatra is a poet of heart; no, not so much of the mind. But he has reached an age where his body deceives his very self. Now that the body is slowly, willy-nilly, becoming a burden, the word "shoulders"– which he might have considered obnoxious a decade ago – has found itself in the place of heart, to which he is growing diffident, sullen : "The heart has nothing to learn", as he says in "Sunday"; it is the same heart of which he was confident one and a half decades ago:

> Where is that absence which pushed an icy rope
> down my throat, so close my heart could have
> touched it?
> ("Four Rain Poems")

The same "absence"; the same "waiting"; the same haunting unfulfilment. Only the shadow of aging has intervened in-between, demanding for itself an exclusive attention from the poet. All the changes in theme admitted, his mode of giving shape to the immaculate feeling, and dissolving the existing shape of things into a flux, continues. The shape about which he was very

uncertain, and to which he was trying to give a concrete shape as when speaking of the moribund hours of a man in "A Summer Afternoon" ("and time drawn like a thin wind/to the shape of pain") has come to acquire a body-form. So, the shoulders are not just like "a deserted park bench" but "like the *shape* of a deserted park bench" (italics mine). Aging as the theme of this poem "Waiting" would have suited very well had he retained the poem's original title, which I think was more expressive when it first appeared in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Summer 1982, as "A Poem At Fifty-One".

Old age has come to him like a "weary night bird", like "a gray owl on a branch of (his) breath". The presence of this bird is ominous. The soul is now about to depart like this bird and he is aware of its consequence : he will be left as "a soiled shirt empty of its body". This is a slow step to coming to terms with old age. He has clearly detected indelible signs of aging on his body as well as on his mind.

The indelible sign of old age is a gradual receding from appearance. He feels himself being reduced to a mere "symbol". His "poem taunts (him) like a discarded bone". The naked truth if ageism is that, as Nicolas Beats points out, while we usually associate young age with limbs and reaching out to the vast world, we associate old age with interior organs, and while we think of the young sailing into the world, the body of the youth as the social interaction, we think of the immobilised, infirm elderly as turning inward, obsessed with the invisible working of their bodies' internal mechanism. It is this which the recent poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra explains so tellingly :

> Here I lie, watching
> the summer of my body
> trembling over the grass
> ("Summer Afternoons")

Here we find the poet watching "the summer of (his) body", not the stars, sky and fullmoon night around him as a young man would have watched, instead. He is preoccupied with the dark workings of the inside of his body. His gaze is inward, bodyward. "Grass", which is a symbol of youth

and vitality, seems to be here merely a shred of memory, overlooked, existing on a different plain; a thing of the past. Where there was once suppleness and tone —"grass"— now there is dryness, loss of colour —"summer"—; an "absence". Now with him there is rigidity and flaccidity, as one would find with old age:

> It is my own presence today
> that hardens
> the trees and their fruit.
>
> ("Summer Afternoons")

In fact in a recent interview to *Indian Express* he has said what he had never admitted before: "I have been working hard somehow feeling that I don't have much time left. The morbid streak you find in my poetry is also there within me. The idea of death has always been with me."* Of course, elsewhere, he had already equated death and poetry: "It has sometimes been said there are two main things poets can write about : love and death. For in poets dwells Man, this biological being, delicate, easily hurt, easily destroyed. And if one thinks a little on this, one will come to the conclusion that in reality there is only one subject all poets speak about — and it is death."**

The imagery he uses for aging is bare, almost brutal. This imagery speaks of lives and of things beaten up, chopped, battered, ruined, and empty. They are "as though I was no human, only a turd", "a leper's mutilated hands", "damaged drum", "dark pitchers of bodies", "battered stone walls" etc. Whatever he looks at, whether at the historic river of Days where Ashoka, conquering Kalinga, presently Orissa, massacred thousands of Oriyas and was soon moved by its gory sight to adopt and patronise Buddhism, or at the ruined "Shivaji's Fort at Panahalla", or at "Love's Fragment", the imagery comes

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*Indian Express *(Madurai, India), September 5, 1987.*

***"Poetry : Climate For Renewal". "The David H. McAlpin and Sally Sage McAlpin Lecture" by Jayanta Mahapatra, A Dhvanyaloka publication (Mysore, India 1985), pp. -16.*

filtered through an aging man's eyes. So his poetry carries with it the burden of physical decrepitude.

> The rusted body of a mutilated automobile
> watches me behind closed eyelids.
> With barely a whisper my blood shuts the door.
>
> ("River")

He cannot close his eyes to that "something/that stands eyeing you from the opposite shore" (The Life). Why be afraid of that? Death is the biological destiny of life. Old age is necessary though not a sufficient condition for death.

At the root of gerontophobia lies an unconscious threat of a differentness in body-structure. Anything that is different represents a threat to the existing value system. Aging, feared as it is, represents death, decrepitude to the self and to the cultural and social imagination. Jayanta Mahapatra is not only disturbed by his own corrosive age but also is shocked by the unnatural, premature deaths and disease in the Third World. "The fleeing children of Nellie" "shaking on their mothers' slashed stomachs" ("Winds of Spring, 1983"), an insane "mother cradl(ing) her child's head/that lies without its body" ("Summer 1983"), "Children struggl(ing) with their last summers" ("A Startled Sun") make him feel ill at ease.

His recent imagery speaks of a kind of life which has met its end, or is nearing it. Granted that the same life had a goal, a determination to follow, is it not death that has strangled all its possibilities? Old age offends the very possibility of the existence, sometimes a value system. Where, today, is that significance of 30th January, the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, as it used to have years before? In "30th January 1982 : A Story" the poet is violent in depicting the violation of non-violence. The characters depicted in this poem are not that old but their moral decrepitude is prominent. It was the "rich woman" who "cursed the Government" when "the mobile loudspeaker van/of the Department of Public Relations swept past/pouring out the words of Gandhi's once-favourite hymn" ("30th January, 1982: a story").

The same morning

> Neighbors both, Amar Babu and Sham Babu smiled
> sweetly at one another as they chose
> their choice cuts of meat hanging from the hooks
> in the market place.

So, the country in relation to this poet, "makes (him) more embarrassed than lonely" ("May"). If this country with its political and economic disorders makes him "more embarrassed", it is his own aging that makes him lonely. He thinks himself old or his hand feeble enough to change the world. As a result of either, or both, his turning inward seems to be an impulsive growth. If youth is narcissism, old age is the reverse of it. And Mahapatra's poetry consequently opens his eyes inward.

Like racisim in the West, here in India ageism, like casteism, is also viewed with some sort of prejudice. Here the elderly are looked upon with sentimentality. Jayanta Mahapatra's way of looking at his aging body is in a manner of dreaming, of looking back at his former, irrevokable self, and with that, hoping to re-establish what is lost, as the following poem, needing to be quoted in full, illustrates :

> What does my world say?
> I follow the substance of my shadow
> in the procession of light on the leaves,
> and I watch myself, standing in the shadow,
> afraid to step out of it.
> But then the sun comes down on me....
>
> Can one grow strong ever
> in such a constantly resurrected day?
>
> The sky that teaches one at night
> when the day is done.
> So often I hide, playing a game with myself,
> my suffering the only thing that's hard to bear.
> Leeches of stars keep sucking my blood.
>
> Just *my* world, the odors I've become immune to.
> Goatherds, jasmine, this woodsmoke of pyres.
> Have I not told you
> that I see myself, hear myself distort the truth?

My name never getting worn, never frayed and dead.
The sun hanging out of the window, a leering face.

Ah, these eyes of mine, narrow with love!

("Harvest")

Undoubtedly this is an old man's world, self-contained. A flower, after full blooming, is about to wrap itself with its enveloping petals. The world of lilies will go on. Thus the poet does not find old age antithetical to beauty. He is only worried about his aging and its resultant pain and suffering: "my suffering the only thing that's hard to bear". That is, he is not disturbed as much by the loud suffering of the outer world as by the inaudible working of suffering inside his body and in his own inverted world. Before his eyes there is a world of the young that haunts him: "leeches of stars keep sucking my blood". In the world outside him he sees light and festivity, "the process of light" on "leaves", "sun" and "stars", but sees himself standing in shadow, "one at night". Though he is now a citizen of the dark zone of his body there is a lone light burning within him which he names as "this woodsmoke of pyres". Brooding over it, he is burdened by an immense self-pity :

Have I not told you
that I see myself, hear myself distort the truth?

And yet, this is not mere self pity as he would make us believe. Before the poem is about to close upon itself, he almost pounces in self-defence upon that part of his self which takes him by the collar of his instinct like the mythological elusive golden deer of his quest. To protect his feeble self, his illusion of immorality, "my name never getting worn, never frayed and dead", he finds the mighty sun as a mere "leering face". Finally, he ends up narcissistically, abruptly :

Ah, these eyes of mine, narrow with love!

Aging as he is, how does he look at another aging body? Does he accept the other aging body or reject it? The onslaught of ruins on the decrepit body of his society has already made him feel "embarrassed". He has an implacable sympathy for the victims, and pity for his own helpless self. Rather than

himself, he has someone else to blame for the wrong doings in the society in which he lives— the Orissan deity, Jagannath. He, with the suffering children scoffs at "the atrocious innocence of Jagannath/in his sheltered shrine" ("A Summer Afternoon"). The irony intended is this : the Lord who should shelter others is Himself well "sheltered" in his shrine. This strain of being sullen with his god at unjustified personal or societal suffering he appears to carry from the medieval tradition of Oriya poetry when the poets taunted their gods in a diction usually used between dear and intimate ones, simply because they felt they had the right, as true devotees, to demand poetic justice from their god. The very same inexplicable sense of one's belonging to one's god is also felt here in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. The poet almost asks himself: of what use is that lordly "innocence" which cannot mitigate human suffering, that cannot put an end to massacres, bloodshed and hatred? In such a society Mahapatra is bound to see things differently. When the poet speaks of his father, he puts himself in his father's place and tries to gauge for himself the travails of aging, without moralising, without sentimentalising:

> My father, sad-faced father! how very far you are
> from this empty room filled only with myself....
> tomorrow maybe I'll hear my father is dead
> but he might bear the face of my son.
> This is the hour when there is no distance
> between the two of them.
>
> ("The Hour before Dawn")

The poet observes his aging father with a cold, third eye. His father is far away from him. The poet is isolated like an island in "the empty room filled only with (himself)". Elsewhere he said, "we now echo our father's dignified voices". This shows how far his father has receded from him. His voice is with him, rather he has kept for himself the echo of that "dignified voice". But the poet is not willing to concede with his father's wilful distancing away from himself. He finds his father's aging reasonable, perfectly in the course of things. In order to achieve this, he adopts the strategy of distancing his father's body from its possessive noun "father", thereby enabling himself to feel

pain and sympathy for his father and a simultaneous disgust for *the* ruinous body. While the body must wear out in its natural course the spirit of fatherhood must prevail, that he be the father of his son. This almost bridges the generations bodily:

he might bear the face of my son.

Thus, the poet is able to establish an unseverable umbilical chord, of which each is a constituent thread. The dignity of life – despite its receptacle and obstacle, the body – goes on.

Finally, we ask, what is the psychology of the poet's self in confronting his own aging? He has already witnessed death, as is clear in the following elemental images: in the sky ("dead whiteness of the sky", water ("time rests its terrible quiet on water"), stone ("monstrous stone"), fire ("woodsmoke of fire"). The poet realises that his body is about to go back to its elements and so, his poetry tends toward the elemental. The death before him is both auditory and visual: he sees a "pariah kite from another world", he hears "a voice from another world". Now that the body, which consists of elements, has begun to give off its prenatal odours, the already ever-existing gap between the body and the self is likely to be more widened. These two are no more in harmony. Aging is a cult of the self, not the cult of youth. The self always feels young; it does not wear out with the body. Whereas, in the case of body, its growth is too steady and noticeable :

dreams strangling the heart of old men
who feel they were always born old....
("The Wind")

The self will never agree with this sort of corporal sentimentality. To this effect, in literary imagination, the mirror image dominates :

It is not that I face
a total stranger suddenly sometimes....
("Of This Evening")

Jayanta Mahapatra sees in the mirror another face in the place of his own. He finds himself "a total stranger", an

interloper, a tresspasser on his own familiar body. In such a poetry as in his, there is no horror image of the aging body as seen against the pleasures of the mirror image of a youthful Narcissus. Here there is nothing uncanny indeed; there is no "dread and creeping horror" of the aged body, as Freud would say. This happens partly because the body is taking its natural course, partly because of the poet's insight into his indispensible aging. He has never been blind to his self alienating itself from the aging body: "It's not that I face/ a total stranger suddenly sometimes". There is no shock in recognising the truth of often seeing his self slowly turning a hostage to his body, for he has never denied himself the truth of humanity, as is seen in his poem "Season of the Old Rain". If at all he has ever pretended youthfulness, it was with the realisation that it was mere deceit :

> I ape a poet's poise
> in my soiled shirt as though it were empty of its body,
> as though what was inside was all thin mind;
> and I ape the stone of my father's: bland eyes,
> meek shoulders, to take whatever might come.
> Here wasn't this pure deceit? I see them all
> trying hard not to stare at me, in their midst,
> and I shake head sadly, get up from the chair
> to walk over to the window....
>
> ("It's my Room Once Again")

It is the insight into his aging that has saved him from vanishing into the dark pit of his frigid self. His self has come to live in terms with his body, aging-wise, dialogue-wise and also memory-wise, with an abandon:

> a careless memory inhabit(s) my walk.
>
> ("A Time")

BIPIN PATSANI

INDIAN SPRING

I

Like twilight
Indian Spring is a transition
Between two passing phases.
Apart from coldness
And heat of passion
It is a romantic quest.

II

Think of your own experience, friends,
After many a night's suffering
When you wake up in the rain
And feel the caress of
Infant hands round your neck,
How do you react?
How do you react
When a kind of sweetness
Knocks at the door and walks in
Like your pet little kid
That never knows if it will be killed?

III

'Spring is the time for mating
The time for communion',
Sings the cuckoo, 'wake, wake,
Spring is the time for union'.

IV

Between the dead weight of the past
And uncertain days to come
Spring is the bridge
On which you must relax
And suspend also the fear of drought
That you met last year.

If you do not know the way after
Be contented that
You are arriving at the other end.
Don't worry,
You may not weave fantasies
But you can at least hope to explore.

V

The world is a strange place
With unknown depths,
Where you must learn
To make a house of cards
Uncertain though it is what will happen
When a sudden gust of wind sweeps over it.

VI

'Spring is the time for union,'
Sings the cuckoo, 'wake, wake,
Spring is the time
Of colour and communion'.

JAMES SWAIN

From CROSSING OVER AND COMING BACK

[*Editor's note* : *The following nine poems have been excerpted from a longer sequence. The author, having lived more than ten years in North India, and thereafter for a period of time in the United States, returned to South Asia, this time to the town of Butwal on the plains of Nepal, "Where the countryside is quite like the Indian Punjab up near the foothills of the Himalayas ....So the poems move back and forth in space between Nepal, India and the United States...and back and forth in time from... my parents' days to the days of our grand children." The poems are meant to express the theme of expatriate life, and the fact that "one is never done with comings and goings".*]

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Each one sets God at a distance
in words she can barely use,
in mountains he can barely climb,
in space they can hear nothing in.
God is the eternally displaced, and we
God-displacers also exile each other
there in the snows, the sun. We run away
Distance, the prophet, interpreting the words
divine gestures and all, for snows, for tongue,
for stars, for the foreign face. A kiss would help God.
would give courage to pubescent angels
to at least *try* a non-romantic tongue.
Hardly anyone will kiss a wolf, though:
the pure wet nose and the lively amber eyes...
So each one sets God at a distance.
How many constellations! How many eyes!

THE FISHTAIL

I saw the Fishtail white on pale blue
above the corrugated iron rooves,
the gray banyan and the black high ridges
of Pokhara, deep in morning lanes. I met

a village woman who said "Good morning," and I
"Ajkal barish nahin hota hai." She passed me
and walked down between waist-high stone walls
to turn on the hose in a kitchen garden
of moolie, or white radish, and eggplant...brinjal...
I knew their names in hindi, not Nepali.
Again she passed, entering a nearby gate
and rounding the corner of a low thatched roof
that fit the puzzle of the banyan tree,
the dark ridges and the great white mountain
high up in the morning: the Fishtail, almost dissolved
in the wet, dusty dawn, had waived and smiled!

YOU

How commonplace to notice that each face
differs from the others, like each moment,
like suns among leaves bearing and being born
of wind and branch, pulsing. Where is the sun
that rounds each beaten face of flesh and bone
till the new city appears, promised by God
when you whisper to a dying friend but leave
a small distant weathered mountain?
The question fades, travelling the face
your pilgrimage is soon reflected in....
You, - a preposition ending a sentence,
a familiar word stationed at the world's end.
How commonplace to notice that a banyan
is full of leaves rustling in the sun
and smiling at a wilderness of trunk.

PARTY GAME

After we leave, I shall find myself left
with a party game. Confronted with a tray
of miscellaneous objects, you memorize
what you see, and if you miss nothing
– or less than the others – you win! Give me my tray!
A small girl wees in the bushes. A boy,
carrying a red cloth sack, passes. Petunias

waive in the planter rail of our porch.
A cycle and a rickshaw wink between
distant white houses. A raven crows. A rooster
approximates 'cock-a-doodle-doo!'
Two men saw wood against a white-washed wall.
Two women pass, giggling; and down the hill
comes the dudhwallah, jiggling his cans....
Nine objects spread on a tray of sunlight;
can you remember nine? Can you make them a world
without the language? Don't take them away yet!

The wind is lighter blowing down the valley.
They drift slowly apart....Two women
balancing straw chalices of wet clothes
on two upright heads, pass and are gone.
I remember chiefly you who brought the tray.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO UP HERE?

Out there, where I could barely live,
the great wing hangs bearing us home.
Slowly rising and falling, it reveals and hides
cloud horizons as smooth as quiet seas.
Dark gray-blue in a blue surround, mechanical
as a dinosaur's head, the cabin's shadow
stretches and shrinks along the wing, is quite
alive! We bear the fragrance of gold,
frankinsence and myrrh – presumptuous,
each returns to the new place in the old picture :
the sardar next to us, to a gurudwara
in London where he is granthi; the young woman
across the aisle, abroad with or to
her husband; and we, again bound away home.
We are three hundred strong, and have laid up
happenings; we'll rest in them, eat them,
live in them, attack and retreat with them.
Each will be like a god niched in the great
stupa,– loving a goddess, waiving a sword,
meditating: What can *you* remember
to aid our climb? Did you too come away

confused to fly the 747?
So do all we who fly into the light's picture
on millenia of great primitive wings
become photographs, become primitive hopes,
millenia of sons and daughters out of prime
encounters. PanAm knows only its job.
What in fact *are* we up to up here?

ADAM AND EVE

You think you know the elements, and you do.
You invented ways to talk about them
and stare them down as you would a small boy
till he grows smaller and behaves. We
date earth, air, fire, water and space, –
go out with them, dedicate our comings
and goings to keeping elemental freindships.
"Weren't you glad to be home after Nepal
out of woodsmoke, dirty facilities
etcetera? (an ethnic, not elemental
word). We were happier to go!
Although our jet burned kerosene,
tons of it, it wasn't *mitika tel,*
earth oil in a clay lamp in a stone house
in a snow mountain. It only *got* us there....
Return, O man. Bring all you own to the fire.
See what coils in the ash of a high dawn!

THE LIVING GODDESSES

Looking for another woman? Try
the living goddesses of far-off Nepal.
There are several of these Kumaris,
the most important enthroned in Katmandu.
This popular institution has enabled
Hindu kings to deify lowcast
Buddhist girls and strengthen their cities.
Strange custom, politics by goddesses....
But do the consorts of politics and the con–

sorts of Madison Avenue differ much?
Slowly merchandizing burns life up
and from the burning ground an old woman
and an old man, staves in hand, walk naked away.

FOREIGNERS

They have crows in common, my two countries.
Whether Indian or American,
the crows are gregarious scavengers. Two
will congregate and scavenge the road. Three
will pick at the one dung cake or squirrel skin,
five gather at the puddle or running tap
and caw, and preen and occasionally drink;
for crows are talkers, foreign or domestic,
and not song birds. At dusk they get up a dead tree
for a Greek chorus, and let fly clawfulls
of dark, seedy sound so the black rooves
ruffle their shingles and rattle to talk back.
I don't know what crows mean in America.
In the Punjab they mean'Company's coming!'

A BONE TO PICK

Mark the dead squirrel and the day's end,
Traffic and the earth's turn change things.
Cast thought and body into new times,
remember Butwal : keep putting together,
keep watering, keep whistling for, keep calling
"ally-ally-insies," or whispering
"Why does the ugly old woman love
the ugly old man of 'God, you and I've
a big bone to pick; we've a common complaint,
a darkness that makes us say,"Let there be light" '?"

MANJIT SINGH HEYER

YEARNING

Moments of despair eventually pass,
Like seasons nothing seems to last;
Sip by sip the juice of life I drink,
And staring sadly at the empty glass,
I dream and I think,
Of things great and small –
Flowers that wither, leaves that fall,
Paralytic forms lying like pebbles cast
On death's silent shore....

Wrapped in this death-like darkness,
The land of night
Stands still in its endless height,
Not a dream, not a thought dare stir
For fear of awakening her;
Just vain desire like an ocean swells
To seek life where love dwells....

K. G. KUMAR

ANOTHER ONE

Wouldn't mind
another one
to take me
over the hill

Wouldn't mind
another one
to push me
over the edge

With that one,
I know,
comes the kick

with that one,
I'm sure,
descends peace

Wouldn't mind
another one
to set me
on a roll

Wouldn't mind
another one
to kill my
fatigue

So please oh please
one more
just one more

Wouldn't mind
another one
to black me out.

MUD HOUSES

Into the thatched huts above the canal
only my imagination is allowed to enter.

There, above the slimy hyacinths
and the crush of healthy green stalks,
up the crumbling bank of brownblack mud,
my mind bumps against pots of earth,
denting prides.

There they live, scream and curse,
milk slothful buffaloes and even
slaughter pigs sometimes,
while from between dried palmleaves
curl smoke, upwards, out into the air
like the soft sighs of grandparents.

In those lived moments
whose pale and mottled reflections
rock unsteadily on the water's edge,
on its torpidity,
only baked mud and packed earth matter,
and jagged thatching, as safe as
the wrinkled palms of aged mothers.

YOGA TEACHER

He is a man of many smiles.
They quiver his muscled stomach
and crinkle up his brilliant eyes.
His furrowed brows begin to buck.

His hands are wiry and steady
and slow in crushing betelnut.
He knows the world waits patiently
as he chews with eyes gently shut.

The walls and floor cold as marble
shelter us from cars and buses.
Spine erect, soon to be supple,
his tongue spoons out ancient verses.

Flowing through various asanas,
lithe body mine to emulate,
his smiles are the core of my class;
but my mind squirms for other bait.

DESECRATION

Making love to women
how you desecrate their essence.

This the eye of the mind cannot see.
The eye of memory is blinkered by
formless thighs swimming in sea-lined roads.

And how these folds, pink and velvety,
pale and sometimes liverish,
flap their eons through the irises
of this cruel memory.

Dumb memory,
whose tongue has been singed by
the acridity of sweatcreases.

The mind's eyes cannot travel
beyond these moments
and memory, cruel as lipless laughter,
creeps away amputated.

NIGHT

Damp night,
hyphened by the mad wailings of
dogs set free

Around me,
the night's colours
bleed through the window grills,
past the red curtains
long since blanched,
not soaking them, not even staining them
until they skim over my naked chest
like the clammy limbs of furtive spiders

There, two three maybe five
white hairs curl and bristle gently
in the dark,
warped hyphens of silence
standing up to the billowing night

Damp dark,
not my guest now,
no, certainly not invited
on this most baleful of nights

SEARCH FOR LOST HOMES

Squiggly worms of lines crawling
in frenetic copulation,
resonating with the vibrations
of ovoid drums:

I must return to these rounded words,
the language from which I must have emerged,
search for lost homes captived in them and,
invoking my filial privileges,
burgle their camphorboxes.

I must then echo the ragas
trapped behind the strings of those forms,
ease them out of my prodigal mouth
and watch them curl up like woodsmoke.

These will attract and amass the millions,
return to them what is rightfully theirs.
Only these.

Grope home, then, to these. Play with them.
Toss them about, smear them on.
Let them ooze through and dribble out.

LIVELONG

these are days enveloped in grey
packed in cartons of weary sighs
pickled in the brine of yesterday's rainy night

the dark damp brings with it the
faraway sounds of unknown breathings :
a child's kite that has snapped
its lifeline and floats off softly

these are days blinkered in tears
when laughter is cocooned and splintered
into disparate pieces of lying nerves

the dawn's mellow greetings have
soured and all the sparrows have gone
leaving their nests behind like
prisoners set free after many
thunderclapped monsoons

these are days saddled on aged horses
whose hooves furrow the wet earth and
drag gunnysacks of dying faces for miles

the wind no longer nuzzles the curtains
squirrels tire of the jackfruit and
sunshine melts into calipered hoods:
a sinewy hangman at crack of dawn

these are days huddled in mute throbbings
smothered in snakeskins of venom
befuddled in the dishwater of soporific vision

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K. G. Kumar lives in Trivandrum, Kerala. His work has appeared in *Chandrabhaga*, *Poetry Chronicle*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and elsewhere. Recently he won First Prize in the Fourth All-India Poetry Competition organised by The Poetry Circle, Bombay.

Sukrita P. Kumar, whose book, *Apurna*, has recently been published, is a fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla.

Jayanta Mahapatra is the Founding Editor of *Kavya Bharati*, the Editor of *Chandrabhaga* for the seven years preceding, and one of India's foremost poets. He has tirelessly and fruitfully encouraged many others to develop and share their skills in poetry writing.

Poovan Murugesan sends his poems from his residence in William Faulkner country, Oxford, Mississippi, in the United States. This is the first appearance of his work in *Kavya Bharati*.

Rana Nayar is Lecturer in the Department of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He has previously taught at St. Bede's College, Shimla in Himachel Pradesh.

Makarand Paranjape is Reader in the Department of English, Hyderabad. In addition to numerous contributions to this and other journals, he has published a book-length critical study, *Mysticism in Indian English Poetry*, and more recently a volume of his own poems entitled *The Serene Flame*.

Rajeev S. Patke is Reader in the University of Poona, and Fellow of the National University of Singapore. A former Rhodes scholar, he has published a study of the poetry of Wallace Stevens.

Bipin Patsani teaches at Government Secondary School, Kalaktang, in the West Kameng District of Arunachel Pradesh.

Nirmala Pillai, whose work appears here in *Kavya Bharati* for the first time, sends her poetry from her residence in Bombay.

E. V. Ramakrishnan teaches English at South Gujarat University in Surat. He has written previously for *Kavya Bharati*, and his poetry has frequently appeared in *Chandrabhaga* and in other journals.

M. S. Ramaswami, a retired magistrate now living in Coimbatore, has translated the work of many Indian and American poets into Tamil, and has also done considerable Tamil to English translation.

Rama R. Rao has published many poems in literary periodicals of the United States, where he lives in Springfield, Missouri. His books of poetry, *Trishanku: Neither Here nor There*, has recently been published in India, and more recently still he is at work on a book of poems translated from Kannada, as well as another volume of his own verse.

K. M. Sherrif has submitted from his residence in Bharuch, Gujarat, his translation of a poem of the much-honoured Malayalam writer, N. N. Kakkad.

James Swain has taught more than a decade in North India, principally in Baring College, Batala, Punjab. Though he is now resident of Cedarville, Illinois in the United States, he continues to visit family members in the Indian sub-continent, as his poems in this issue indicate.

Rabindra Kumar Swain (no relation to James), who contributes to this issue a review article and a long poem from his home in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, has published poetry, articles and translations in well over a dozen books and journals in India and abroad. He is currently at work on a Ph.D. thesis on the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra.

Shrikant R. Thambe, of Aurangabad, Maharashtra, contributes to this issue both original poetry, and translations of two poems from *Muktayam* of Kusumagraj (Vi. Wa. Shirwadkar), who has recently won the Juanpith Award for his extensive work in Marathi poetry.