KAVYA BHARATI

THE STUDY CENTRE FOR
INDIAN LITERATURE IN
ENGLISH AND TRANSLATION

AMERICAN COLLEGE
MADURAI

Number 4

1992

Kavya Bharati is the literary publication of the
Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation,
American College, Madurai 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.

Kavya Bharati is a review of Indian poetry.

Kavya Bharati welcomes contributions of poetry, essays on poetry, translations of poetry and review articles. Please enclose a self addressed stamped envelope with all submissions, which must be original typescripts, or else they may not be considered. All submissions should also be accompanied by brief bio-data about the writer, sufficient to identify the writer as he desires in case his submission is published. Utmost care will be taken of manuscripts but no liability is accepted for loss or damage.

Manuscripts from abroad must include a self-addressed envelope and an adequate number of international reply coupons.

Opinions expressed in *Kavya Bharati* are of individual contributors and not those of the editor or publisher.

All manuscripts, queries, subscriptions and orders for the journal should be sent to Paul L. Love, American College, Madurai 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.

Subscription: In India, Rs. 30; Foreign, $ 7 U.S., £ 4 U.K.
Single Copy Price : Rs. 30.

Edited by R. P. Nair

KAVYA BHARATI

a review of Indian Poetry

Number 4, 1992

CONTENTS

Poetry Section

Translation Section

FOREWORD

This issue of *Kavya Bharati* is divided into three sections: one for original poetry, a second focused on translation, and a third section of reviews. The translated poems are framed by two essays, the first discussing problems encountered in translating poetry, the second analysing what has happened in the course of translating one Sanskrit drama into English. Meanwhile, in the Reviews section readers will find, in two cases, additional responses to volumes of poetry that are also included in our Review Essays. Perhaps these "second opinions" will add to the liveliness of the poetry criticism that *Kavya Bharati* is attempting to promote.

Reader response to these innovations would be welcomed. In fact, one important piece of Reader Response is already included in this issue: John Oliver Perry's appreciative but analytical reply to Rajeev Patke's essay that appeared in *Kavya Bharati* 3. The staff of *KB* is especially gratified to receive thought-provoking reaction such as this, and would be pleased to receive such replies to material in our current issue.

Finally, a word about the periodicity of our journal, since many readers have inquired about it. Because of shortages in *KB's* staff, one issue in a year is all that we have been able to produce so far, though we receive enough good material to publish twice as often. Until we overcome this shortage of staff we ask for patience, from our readers and especially our contributors, who often must endure intolerably long delays before they see their work in print. Good poems and essays are already "waiting in the wings" for *Kavya Bharati* 5. We assure a warm response to all other such quality material, even though that response may be delayed.

NISSIM EZEKIEL

SINGAPORE SEQUENCE

A Prose Poem

Likely to be alone all day, in doubtful
confidence I cancel out my loneliness, walk
freely through that promised gate of heaven
known as solitude, and hear the same voice
heard all my life: change, grow, reach out,
find the exact name.

An early morning message from Confucius
arrives at my door in a newspaper. It speaks
of *li* (ritual) and *ren* (moral energy, judgment,
resources, excellence). I read it over and
over again as though listening to music
from a neighbour's TV.

"He who does not learn *li*," Confucius said,
"cannot fulfil himself." And : "In carrying out
li, harmony is to be cherished." Also: "A man
without *ren*, what has he to do with *li*?"

I think of my life with its undervalued *li*
and its flawed *ren*. I think of those who suffered
because I was lost in my labyrinth of needs,
which cannot be named, even now. I've failed to
learn how to meditate or pray. Whenever I
decided I had to meditate or pray, I read
books on meditation and prayer.

It does not help much to list one's failures :
the betrayal of ideals, the compromise of
convictions, the confusion about goals in
mere activity.

Says the author about the Confucian message :
"The ideal situation is a perfect equilibrium
between *ren* and *li*, whereby *ren* can develop
itself within *li*, and *li* is creatively maintained
for the development of *ren*."

No, not for me the perfect equilibrium, but *li*
and *ren* suggest a possible journey. One step
in that direction may even help me dress better!
And handle money sensibly, relate with less obliqueness
to my family, relatives, friends, colleagues and
strangers.

It may remove the chips on my shoulders,
and make more room for the burdens that matter.

4 December 1988

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

A POEM FOR A TRIBAL ELDER

It was time I changed myself, I thought,
as I walked across the barren fields
with their death-face of tired evenings;
changed myself from the poet my poems
made me out to be, from the black-and-white rules
my own hunger for words made me cover myself with,
walking into the village in my mind,
down the outcrops of rock, through the spread
of *alasi* flowers, into the sparse grain
deserted in the dark like funereal ceremonies.
There is only this village shining like firelight
on the sweating backs of men, the black chasms
of light-hearted songs in women's buoyant mouths,
and the cracked red earth of endurance I saw
in a quiet, old man's eyes.
Often I'd walk the distant truths
poems were supposed to hold, thinking it's time
that I must move beyond, beyond the truce
that made me see how small death is,
in my eagerness to catch hope against hope,
toward the hiding-place
under the roots of a fallen country....
What was your name, you said? Bala Jani?
You did not smile at all, standing there
with your karma in your belly, your face too
something I wasn't able to save in the dark
from the ashes of your seventy-odd years.
Tiny squares of weary earth broke up that gaze,
or it was a trembling at the edge
of an evening song, as perhaps the stars above —
and when each time he drunk himself to renewed life
the night someone in his village died.
Some things are best that one must not see.
It was time I left the village, I thought then,
wondering if it were *my* life facing him

that was snapping the taste of his own senses;
he had the ruined crop, the torn fields, the spirits
of his ancestors returning again and again
to reclaim their own, but I could not escape
the disturbances in the flowers,
the fear of the possibility of nothingness
in the tame white thistles by the river's banks;
to beg forgiveness of the world means so little
and an imaginary guilt simply scans
the unfathomable infinity of the skies.
That night, walking back in the rain,
I heard the moan of the wind behind him
across the ribs of my limp, wet umbrella.
Where are you now, Bala Jani?
Do I want to change myself, trade my poems
for a field of golden *alasi* blooms?
In the shadows of men
can goodness be seen? How it paces
underneath the breastbone. My shadow too,
although it clings against me, has never
broken the silence that consumes my days,
as I try to find a place among the ones
who live on the pure cry in the air,
as it wells the veins of earth, black coal,
going back then to the tree and to the time of what is.

THE PRESENCE

A wisp of cloud as though laying siege
to the swollen body of the sky,
or like a puppet breeze moving,
silently stalking the grass at the field's edge.
Here the rains linger on stolid hill slopes,
empires still drag their bloody histories along;
and as I peer into my half-empty shelves,
something there in the dust
that rests on the phantom papers of the past
appears to hold on to the meaning of the world.
I let myself remember
how at a railway station long ago,
I stood at a ticket-window feeling for this presence
with unfulfilled hands for a kind of future.
But was it now to be felt
simply as a shape in the dark,
whose features had passed the flush of spring,
an uneasy dove with white, lyrical wings?
Was it some disguise, a mask
I should have killed then,
as it began to destroy what had been built anew?
Today I hear its stubborn voice,
dipping endlessly in and out of sleep.
It is the centre of everything that exists,
the pain of autumn seeping between the branches,
the shadow under orphaned children's eyes,
the morning star groaning under
the weight of yet another night,
it is the dead fish turning up once again
its white belly in the water.
I humble myself and feel it still :
the blank face of a negotiating table
more than four thousand years old,
the tale handed down from one generation
to another until it is thrown to the streets.
This ground is jagged with the defeat
of races, of miles of memories;

huge shadows and dark waters of a lifetime
now come after us, climbing our way.
Once, as a child, I realized
I would be watched, identified with performance;
and I went on to learn the face of a man
who left me alone in the soundlessness of a tear.
The trees around me never moved.
Picking up the morning newspaper,
I encounter a shadow : mine, the fear
of knowing what might be out there,
and its poem, evidence of a pardonable pride.
From the starved earth a silence
rises so incredible, it hurts the ears.
The cloud I saw once, bent on suicide.
And the underground test, pilgrim of a new world,
carrying easily over the distance between us.
It is the same rain now, the same grass;
perched in its dark circle, the dreamless bird
breaking the spirit of trees in waking and in sleep.
And I always seem to fear it,
because whatever grows from this presence
is the destiny I feel I shall share.
Almost like knowledge, like the past,
moving along the wall like a gecko,
it starts hunting out the bright-eyed insects
freed by rain from the hidden earth of my future.

POEM FOR FATHER

So, at last, the death
you knew would come,
to grow smaller with your room light,
break the waiting, heavy silence.
There, perhaps, for the first time
I saw the strength back in your eyes.
It was so long you suffered;
the hours we fussed over you,
that nothing was serious
as reason cooled and held us,
when time seemed to be all there
but went past, amazed
at our continuing dreams of things.

You were the stronger of us two,
although you knew you were dying;
you knew exactly at those moments
of what I kept searching for,
as though I were lying on my back
and looking up, beyond,
into morning, for the movement
love could probably bring,
the empty place that had in it
to draw those desires I coveted.
All you had to do was to die
and I feared I'd be awake till daylight.

My life might have gone
a little better, I sometimes think,
if you had lived. But it was
painful to see death, freezing
you into stupor, without a care for you.
Nothing can touch me now,
but that empty place
where I pretended once

to love you, out of pity.
So, at last, your death,
vaster than this light,
to get down what it has to say.
But in silence.
It doesn't exist to fulfil me.
And my young son looks the other way.

A RAIN HANGING FROM THE BRANCHES

The roles this face plays,
as if belonging to a man of the mind,
lonely, mysterious, despairing,
a rain hanging from the branches.
Most of the time I lived believing
I could share in another's unhappiness,
wanting to sit down in the park
beside the old man of my neighbourhood
whose face I was familiar with,
but the sunlight of the day
always seemed to laugh
across the dark valley of the night
I was trying to cross.
And a dream like a headless goat
exposes my own self-glorification.

Listening to someone else's story
drags the chances of life into some abyss.
I look at the time,
through dust and darkness,
wanting to believe in self-knowledge,
and I remember many at those moments
who were coming apart at the seams.
And I found that people
could understand suffering
because they moved away
from the one who suffered.

Now beside an empty seat,
a premonition points
to the brightness beyond in the sky.
In the rain-mist,
the moon spies on our lives.
What is it, this memory
where the spoor in the dust
sees not what was, nor

what will be, but what is?
That man of the mind had come
to destroy me; our desires
were the same, and life
did not allow us to look
into our own hearts.
My little handful of life
has slowly let me lose my way.
Even my old widowed mother
looks at me and knows
I fear the thought of love,
as the rain goes on
whispering obscenities beneath the leaves.

JOHN ALTER

IN THE CLEARING

Some mushrooms can kill,
some blow the lid off every cell
in your body,
others whimsically conclude
the forest's conversation.

Magical,
their names & for the gentle man
who comes into the
secret places they will speak
as from that dream in which

as if by magic
we are found to have
a name, a private gentle place.
He comes now
down the almost indecipherable path,

a gentle man,
the silent
forest gathering around him, with-
drawing him
as with a charcoal the artist draws

for one & for love with-
draws the face we will remember,
the few sure lines. A gentle
man he walks now past the bridge
the old stone wall and out across

the meadow where
deer will come in their season, with-
out fanfare slips out, carefully shuts
the door, does not disturb the sleeping children.
A dreamer he now goes into

the dream. It is there he gathers
a subtle, lasting feast. Gone
now, gone
into the horizon of things,
beyond memory's painful constructions.

I will go now
down to the edge of the cove & sit
on the rocks to watch the moon rise.
In his honor, for whom mountains & mush-
rooms deferred delight.

In the forest, in the hidden watchful
places. For him now effortlessly
the mountains are a slow wave & he glides
towards the islands of his
heart's content.

— for Jim Nichols, died May 3, 1991.

TAKING THE TIME

There are many kinds of insomnia.
Unwittingly in your honor your grand-
son cries out breaking his father's night wide
open. The yoke of my dreams spills. Never
mind that I had not planned to take this time

off. Half-jokingly I add some cream, some
flour, make us some bread to break together,
a birthday cake. Wrap up this hour. Today
seventy-one years ago, first born, you

came as a gift from the gift-giver, broke
your father's life wide open. O fisher-
man, it is October again! Beside
your river the sycamore & maple

blaze. A restless fox prowls. The morning star.
There are many kinds of insomnia.

2

Fisherman, it is October again.
Sugar maples blaze beside your river,
a slow glory. A restless fox prowls. Your
grandson sleeps now. You stand on the peaceful

shore, the morning light bright in your new eyes
a new day breaking wide open around
you, and cast your line out into living
waters. The doxology your heart sings

your son can only imagine, the talk
you can now have, the theology. My
night broken I walk through October's odd
pentecost down to the river's bank. You

are there. Together we break bread, your birth-
day cake. The kindness of insomnia.

— A Birthday Poem for My Father, 1919-1983

until at last he fell
from the shelf and could not, the light leading
him,
translucent on the narrow old stones,
the old way
it leads him down to where the sudden valley
opens out and there, far away but within the
horizon his father stands and is
he at last
across the precarious bridge? the man asks
nobody, a crow perched on the barren tree
in the field of stone.

A dog,
an element of anger, the narrowing of
his life to this one place, a step to take.

ANGER

'Honor your anger'
He climbs down
the old stone steps the man climbs down
at last the tunnel
narrow steep as a throat opening dank
where all dreams take voice
but a light gleams on the narrow stones
each like a bone stripped bare of distraction
it is a tomb through which light beckons a
valley
of stones each quarried by time
from a mountain and there is light there are
young orchards growing somewhere but not for him his path
goes through rocks and is almost
scorched, in the sand footsteps
he knows them they lead him towards
the familiar
place
the bank of the river where in
another time his father stood staring across
in a quiet rage
at the other side where young orchards grow
and the quick slope of the mountain leads up
away from the village and
the tame mangy dogs the corn fields up
to where the snow leopard prowls
his rage yearning to cross over to be gone
a narrow bridge
& there is danger

2.

The man climbs down
at last. For many days he could not
find these steep stone steps. The wind blew
ripping branches from the old trees
in the garden for many days, cold and from
the mountain, shaking the tame house

JANUARY 16

What are the birds of Baghdad singing today?

Another dawn
in the world's oldest city.
On each petal of the rose in the garden
ashes,
how bitter the apricots!

exhaustion clouding the bright glance
of Baghdad's children (all night
great vultures screamed,

lights blazed
in a frantic celebration,
in a dream words are violently
changed,

lullaby becomes lament,

lament
violently mutated to babble,—
scum, crud, scud
tomahawk, patriot — in a dream
the two rivers
run with blood, a desert storm threatens
the Tigris, the Euphrates,

in the dreams of her children
Baghdad begins to experience Armageddon,
profit and prophet
dancing at the gallows).

Ashes, exhaustion
& dust, the dust a thousand air raids make,
'smart bombs' disturbing

the old stones (do you not hear
them weeping? in the garden
with the ravaged roses in the dawn,

the horizon gathered around me
like a frightened child, the shattered
minarets, I hear no other sound).

Armageddon happens first
in the cities of language.
The pen easily outdoing the sword.

Another dawn in the world's oldest city.
In the bazaar a merchant unveils
nightmares,
an almanac of folly. From the shattered minaret
the echo of

protestant blasphemies.

We are
caught between
massive rhetorical armies.
A corruption. Each
has equipped the other.

What are the birds of Baghdad singing today?

KAMALA DAS

WAR

On this haggard earth another war begins...
With talismans of words that leap into
the awesome chasms of a Creator's silence
I sought perhaps to annexe emotional
territories, and to cry out, this is
my body, this the man who belongs to me, these
the sons of our union... The brutal dice
of human pride scudding into the ravines
of death and its kinder vales chilling breasts
to marble and returning the milk to its
indiscernible source, yes, the as yet
unrevealed threshold
of a mother's love.

January 18, 1991

CANONS AND CANON-MAKING:

A RESPONSE

John Oliver Perry

I was enthralled by Rajeev S. Patke's essay (in *Kavya Bharati* 3) on "Canons and Canon-making in Indian Poetry in English". How intriguing his final incitement to our top poets, to get cracking on a better anthology! Unmentioned was Vilas Sarang's recent effort, perhaps because it merely continues the pattern that Patke so well defined—"this modernist commitment to the sheer ugliness or the mere ordinariness of the quotidian". He is surely right to critically question this canon as too simply a reverse image of the rejected Dutts, Naidus, Tagores and Aurobindos. Though I am humbled by the adroitness of his analysis, I can't resist commenting that Patke's perspective seems a bit British; i.e., he seems not aware of—or not to see the relevance of—potentially revealing contemporary American literary-cultural issues. The six practical reasons given for the reign of anthologies in India are but one sharp testimony to his acute perceptions of the local literary scene, but he might have made a wider and more questioning use of foreign writers.

Deconstructionism and discussions of "Post-modernism" by mostly American critics in the 1970s and 80s get no play in his analysis. A consideration of these might then have put into historical and cultural perspective the liberal dogmas Patke borrowed unquestioningly from Lionel Trilling about the polemics of Sincerity and of Authenticity, of Romanticism and Modernism. Further, a recognition of the historical characteristics of post-modern or truly contemporary (1965-1990?) poetry in American journals might have provided Patke with the later "period style" he posited with which to judge the possible transhistorical value of 1920s to 1950s Modernist style (which is/was extended, no doubt, by late-modernist, so-called confessional styles of Lowell, Ginsberg, Sexton, Plath, Rich). Poets like Ashbery elegantly (or in other cases raucously or even sentimentally) reveal the current turns of American language-and-culture, AND have no commitment to authenticity of self-doubt or even to social or philosophical

or political-historical doubt (or significance). I'm guessing that these poets—from the supposedly (but not actively) socially concerned ones like Philip Levine or Robert Bly to supposedly intensely inner ones like Galway Kinnell and the many, many feminist and feminine poets—have established a distinctive "Post-Modern" period mode. I can imagine that this mode will be seen to accord with the collapse of ideologies in Western and Eastern Europe and America and the triumph of cynicism (see *The Bonfire of Vanities* and the political scene since Reagan—and Thatcher!).

Though now properly discredited, American/French Deconstructionists did emphasize along with the structuralist the relativity of cultural values and the questionableness of any theories of personality or stable personhood/identity, and, of course, of canons. Patke might have found useful some allusions to all the bitter academic wrangling here about literary and cultural canons and "political correctness" or, as the conservatives tauntingly say, "p.c.". The bases for rejecting both the established and the alternative canons have been, respectively, that they are formed of and by dead white European males, or that they have been radically altered according to a new left ("p.c.") ideology. The alternatives and additions to the canon include, it is claimed, inferior writing that is/was not merely overlooked by blindly ethnophallo-centric Establishment critics but was/is of little inherent interest, and is often emotionally sentimental and factually, demonstrably false.

I would agree that often the newly discovered minority or female writings show little or no artful, crafty manipulation of tensions between available expressions in the medium and the "different"—non-canonical, non-mainstream, "minority"—experience being presented. Again, contrary to main-line late-twentieth century Western criticism, poetry involves re-presentation of (reference to) perceived and lived phenomena in a shared world. And it is these recent poets' alternative experiences themselves that are important, indeed, "authentic" as well as "sincere," even if—or precisely because—they are not the experiences of those people who have controlled, guided and decided the most dominant forces in (mainly Western?)

—history for the past few hundred years. As for criticizing and contesting the false notes and counterfeit currency that creep in to "alternative writing", that is a function of the pre-sorting needed before the alternative canon or period-class-group style achieves its defensible self-defined shape.

These wrangles about canons cannot be sorted out in the contemporary American cultural context by recourse to liberalism (in the old sense that applies to Trilling, not the "extremist" and "p.c." sense cynically developed by Reagan-Bush conservatives). Liberalism has simply been too undermined by both the new left critique and the resurgence of conservatism; and another, stronger, more inclusive perspective will be needed to cope with the cultural questions that confront America today.

In India I suspect that some other style or system of critical criteria "beyond liberalism" will also be needed, specifically to sort out the issue of what to do with, where to place, the savable poems—the less parodic or derivative, the effectively adaptive—in the earlier Romantic mode of Indian English poetry and its lively continuations. The fact is that this style is still widely practiced. Admired by probably the majority of Indian readers, that admittedly tradition-ridden mode is vigorously defended by "nativist" critics like Balchandra Nemade. It is also supported to some extent by sophisticated younger critics like G. N. Devy, who is working toward a distinctly Indian—i.e., multicultural—kind of comparativism to deal with the cross-currents of contemporary Romaticism and Modernism found in the Indian literary scene (both in Indian English and in the regional languages).

How can those two "isms" (both considered outdated in the West's historical rush) be considered by critics in India as "contemporary" and viable? That is the question that Patke brilliantly poses, but he denies that there are contemporary Indian English poets who effectively use traditional regional-language poetic modes and models. He accepts Nemade's judgment that Kolatkar's Marathi poems represent that culture better than his Indian English ones (and does not see that Mahapatra's later poetry may be coming closer to some Oriya patterns, or that the multicultural character of Mehrotra's translations and imitations

drawn from Pali, Bhojpuri, Mughal, etc., offer fruitful possibilities). What we critics need in order to describe and evaluate the rich mixture of poetry being written (*and translated*) today in India—as shown in the array offered by *KB*—is a broad and open (yes, liberal in that sense) range of criteria, but one also drawn from the multiple traditions and styles that are now at work capturing the complexity and contrariness, the deepness and shallowness of thinking and of feeling, found here, there or everywhere in contemporary India.

I do not think Indian critics will need or have much use for a cynical relativistic post-modern criticism that says poetry goes nowhere and is for nobody, only for (or "about") itself. Though it is usually inadequately read and dimly appreciated, mostly by Indian academics and their student captives, Indian poetry is still highly valued in and for the society. Its commonly felt and attributed social uses, whether for diversion or information or deepening contemporary cultural consciousness, guarantee it both a general and a personal cultural significance that seems pretty nearly lost to poetry in the mass-media controlled, increasingly homogenized American society. That accepted significance should encourage Indian critics to develop their own flexible means and varied modes of description, analysis, and evaluation of their poetry, while avoiding either narrow canons or unprincipled relativism. Patke's essay contributes to that development by sharply defining the main critical problem. Bravo.

MEENA ALEXANDER

PRISON CELL

The season is clear, hot
everything magnified
in that cell where you squat
even an ant, a fly
would be company

Open eyed you watch
the jailor dash
a mess of beans, gruel
onto an upturned bucket

Who is this man
this brutal guardian?
An ordinary sting from wasp
or fly would hurt him too?
You wonder.

Later that night
wide awake you tremble.
Pressing through walls
and iron grille
the souls that compose you
enter in

Massed, magisterial
spirits of the dead, lordly
moving slow over manacles
and scrap metal,
township, field and hill

The living too
half grown girls, youths, men, women
little ones crying as they do
for little things
torment you

A ball, a broken hoop
a crust of bread ground up
mixed with water

You push your palms
into the shining stuff
the night is clear, everything magnified

You clench your fists
and draw it in,
ferocious power, speechless, still

Till your woman's flesh
poised against the wall
resembles a statued thing

Lord of oath and redemption
cut from mahogany, marked all over
with screws, wires, chains, razor bits

Note : This poem was completed on June 18 1990 and read out that night at the ceremony 'Words of Praise for the Mandelas and the ANC' held at the New School for Social Research, New York City.

MANDALA

I can see you now: behind your head a hole
where a bird flies in, flame in its beak
all cut in silk from the robes of a Chinese emperor.

At his death the silks were borne
over the mountains to Tibet, parti-coloured threads
stitched into the borders of blessedness.

Our city is all glass: trees, streets, horses
with ice in their manes dragging open carts
glass towers in fractions.

The Tibetan tanka rests on a dealer's wall
on a side street off Madison Avenue.
On it a bird of paradise with no name
except that, a calling which in darkness cries out

Pomegranate streaked wings dragged to the right
against corn coloured silks, a stiffness
of bird flesh swallowing its own shadow.

Closer at hand
in the Museum of Natural History
the Kalachakra Mandala shivers under arc lights.

You have taught me this:
the figuration of blessedness is never tranquil,
it is singular not to be cast away.
Later for us that very day, sunlight, shame

Your pipes all seven of them laid
in a semi-circle beside a mirror;
in a book you had, a stele with flying figure
female, Indic in origin
palms clasped to a beloved throat;
bedclothes in a heap
toothbrush on the floor
spurts of smoke drifting to a high window
no wings visible.

The city locks us both into a hole:
the past's a scratch
against the density of framed silks,
a seizure in the heart.

This yearning almost spends me—
harsh, impenitent, naming names and streets
and meeting places no one we live with will ever know

Ourselves a crooked hieroglyph,
two wings snapped into a sail
as time scrapes itself together
in fiery, stunted waves.

I stand at the window
as sunlight crushes glass into a rose
and men in turbulent rings,
not gods but as gods might be, tousled, muscular
punch ears and bloody nose and leap
over the wall at Central Park South

Into the spew of cars, fast hooves,
the asphalt of a road bordered by winter trees,
black river almost

Love's trajectory
where a silken thing centuries old
flies in courting death, and natural histories
cast into skin, nipple and nail

Prevail, solving time's compassion.

Note : The Kalachakra Mandala (Wheel of Time Mandala), a figuration for the Blessing of Time, was created by Tibetan Monks in the Museum of Natural History, New York City. The entire intricate surface was formed by the patient pouring out of multicoloured sands. It was the first time that this sacred form was created outside Tibet. Upon its completion the sands were poured away.

BIBHAS DE

THE BOATMAN OF THE LAST RIVER

Questions have piled up,
Not entirely in the clear stream
Nor in full measure obscured.
All times the water has streamed on
Ceaselessly in our nights of icy winds,
An airy rustling among the dried thistles
In the deodar forest.
And when by the stark light of day
The sandy shallows could no more hide
The little things at urgent spawning,
The genial ripples lovingly took them
Into their blanketed deep.
On the festive night
The doe-eyed widow steals away
To set afloat in her cupped hands
A paperboat lamp in remembrance;
The wind and the river
Cradle it unharmed
To their meandering's end.
The crossings and the questions mingle
To become the last crossing
Or a single question personified.
He looms arched over at the oar —
More an enigma than a query —
The asker of the final question,
The boatman of the last river.

RUINS

It is at first a distancing
Followed in wake by a reconnection
The way teal blue water at twilight
Returns a reflection
That is not quite us
And is then again us
And the moon lets her rays refract,
Catch a certain crumbling minaret
To summon back the plaintive echoes
Of a muezzin's call from over across
A millennium dusk;
And if soulful in Monte Alban
I found a high perch in tawny time,
The skeletal city spread at my feet,
Would I not, history be kind,
Be allowed the privacy of a light
To see the place spill over,
The shoppers, the merchants, and all
Gaily clothed in timely garb
In the rumbling of the incessant chatter,
And to suddenly spot down a side street
What is reaffirming on the face of ruins,
A gathering of the familiar ancestors,
Faces from the germinal depths of time?

A PREDAWN DEATH

After the sunlight crimson on the eastern
Panes, and along the pebble-bare river
Trudging on its weary way past the contiguous
Stretch of moors and hovels and musty lanes
To the brief free run, a festive bursting
Of deltaic green before the pouring death
To the sea, comes that stark realization
Which night benumbs with what is soothing
In a night; come the sayers of farewell, the
Flowers and frankincense, the intoning monk;
The sun bears down vertically on the dead,
Borne face up by mourners to the ordained
Tryst in fire and ash; festive rites sing
The sun's decline, then the pyre is lit.
No mystery precedes a birth, only the
Known steps, the loving, the organic fusion,
The amniotic months; death terminates all,
A sudden wall, nothing beyond is knowable.
When the sun leaves, there's only the pyre;
Light perpetuates light, earth fire carries
The fire in the sky; shadowy comers mingle,
Flames waver, flesh smelling jackals howl;
Late into the dark, the fire is lost:
It is the living's turn to return home;
There, darkly, the absence lurks, a shape
Of emptiness, of what is empty in a night.

WIND ISLAND MINDSET

With the waning of light the wind
Starts to rise, gently at first,
The warm, moist breath of the sea
Lying supine; of the sea
Something always remains.
When the dark takes all from view
Her presence is redoubled
In the medium of sound,
The wind-tossed, wind-loaded sound
That takes on the burden of light
And obliquely confirms
The darkened speck of sea-born land,
The coral forests of the deep eons.
The muffled scream of the spent waves,
On shore, waves of water aglitter
As waves of light, turned waves of sound,
The wind-blown, wind-charged sound
And later the airy disconcert,
On shore, of the wind's unconcern
In the coconut fronds tossing wildly,
Every night, all night, tossing,
Speak most eloquently, if whisperingly
As in a propagated, hushed rumor
Of ones in a stormy conflict
Needing urgently to be calmed.

A man and a woman lie limply,
Each in a separate dream of languor;
A sun-revealed, green water atoll.
A far cinnamon island, its verdure.

MAKARAND PARANJAPE

DURYODHANA'S LAST WORDS

He lies near the stinking pond
Filled with guts and blood;
All around him—devastation and death.
Himself a half-carcass,
His thighs and balls smashed
By Bhima's illegitimate blow,
Broken in several places,
Left to die,
His twisted face lights up again
At the macabre apparition—
Ashwatthma.
And as this angel of death
Narrates the tale of the final
Slaughter—how he stole into
The Pandava tents after dusk
Putting to the sword every
Man, woman and child,
Duryodhana's smashed, bleeding mouth-wound,
Replies: "Good, good, good."

NECROPOLIS

1: Day

In the pitiless sunlight
Idiots, philistines, riff-raff—
Like gleeful maggots,
Swarm this place;
They are the citizens of this city,
Dressed as tourists.
For a weekend outing.
The vanity of their ancestors
Is suitably rewarded;
They trample over the bones of kings
Illustrating the brotherhood of mankind.
At sunset the dead begin to stir,
Kept in check only by watchmen

And lunatics. They laugh,
Play, and exchange gossip;
The silent trees and sleeping birds,
Bear witness.

2 : Soiree Medievale

The tomb has been decorated;
The Festival of France,
In the hall of the dead.
A medieval setting for medieval music
However alien—
In candle-light even the atmosphere
Is just right.
A hired Hyderabadi courtier
Pays obeisance to the dead
To salve our conscience.
His hands and heart
Both lie as he places a rose
Ceremoniously on the stone slab.
Then the music begins.
West penetrates the East.
The cognoscenti of the city
Are easily pleased
By the array of outdated
Instruments—the kids love
The good old hurdy-gurdy.
My companions are busy otherwise
Making eyes at the guests—
One likes boys, the other
Eyes the women; I smile
at the familiar faces.
The few Europeans in our midst
Are a nice decoration;
White skin looks good
In dark shades of cotton.
The musician, unfortunately,
Is dull; his music is all dead.
And we decide not to wait
For the dance after the interval.

3 : Night

We leave the others behind
And like lost souls,
Embrace the night.
The city of the dead is haunted
With memories which wake up late
Sulking underneath the tombstones
In subterranean catacombs
Throughout the day.
From here, the real city looks ghostly
And remote; a haze of lights
Under a cloud of darkness.
We hear no urban noises
And the dead disallow
Any humdrum chatter: how irrelevant
Is the world of the living
And the limited selves that we drag about
Like unclean bowels.
The moon is high, revealing
The decrepit dome of the mausoleum
Like a diseased breast of a dead woman.
Bats squeak and hurry back and forth
In their bizarre nightly ritual.

4 : The Return of the Dead

I start the car;
At the first twist of the key,
It cranks irreverently.
My admiration of Japanese technology
Is reconfirmed.
The headlights startle a sleeping dog.
At Toli Chowki,
We are reduced to the dust
From whence we came.
Mehdipatnam gives us back
Our chaotic selves.

Nothing is finished;
Everything comes back again.
No city can live
Without a place for the dead.

DARSHAN SINGH MAINI

WHAT GENRE OF LOVE!

You had been kind, love,
To turn cruel at the door,
And bar the way
To the sanctum of your heart.
There were pain enough in that,
And a virtue in that pain;
Musing over a simple fate,
I should have worked out
The great sum of grief
In the autumn of my days!

But no, you had other dreams,
Other songs, other metaphors
Of form and style,
And the riches you offered
Were but a bait
To an imagination of faith!

O what genre of love
This was, a theatre of cruelty
And kindness where
Not even a knife could divide
The skin from the bone,
Or the hero from the harlequin!

Darshan Singh Maini

RETURNING FROM A CONFERENCE

Words deceive words, fold
On fold, in the palavers of dons :
Pagaodas of thought rise
To collapse in mutual consent —
All wind in empty shells.

No, they deceive none,
Neither their pale answering acolytes'
Nor the hired echoing priests
Lighting candles to their
Unpublished books and bells.

So, let me shake them out
Of my teeth and hair,
Let the Madurai memories turn
Briefly to the rhetoric in stones,
And to the deep Freudian wells.

HOSHANG MERCHANT

ELEGY FOR MARTHA GRAHAM

1

Movement, Martha
never lies

2

You were so old
people thought you long dead
you kept dancing
people thought you were indestructible
Each spring with Easter
you resurrected your ballet

You couldn't throw out old myths
along with those dusty slippers
Flat foot made contact with earth
Left the well heeled astonished
(who came with weeping wives)...

3

Now you're a photograph
you're on a swing
It is Appalachian spring
you threaten to burst out
of the photo frame
Giving of yourself as a valentine
to the world

4

This is my letter to the world
that never wrote to me

5

4:30 : Tchelitchew
– A diary entry

6

I am a thief
I steal what I want for my journey
Do not embark with me
unless you can pay at the port of call
where dues are demanded ...

7

Did you wink at Death
or give him hot Clara Bow lips
at 96
as you sneak past the post
Not first to be sure
And surely not the last ...

8

You pushed eastwards
ever eastwards
on a nightflight to Bali
into sunrise
where girls dance
barefoot barebreasted.

SUKRITA KUMAR

FATHERS AND SONS

To be on this side
of the chasm,
with you
on the other,
father and son,
is a lie.

Riding separate horses
and
the widening gaps,
you and I
have missed
the joint gallop,
your nimble
adolescence, my second
stirrings and
confrontations.

I hate your
manhood, my
friendship,
the affinities...

My son,
Can you be seven again?
Seven, when the earth
cracked and we
separated.

Those lonesome columns
of unconstructed monuments,
edifices of my
fatherhood, and you, a child,
stand apart,
with more than a decade
between us.

In the depth of unending
nights
I hear
resounding echoes
from distant planets
echoes of the music
of our togetherness

I, a father
you, my son.

Your ripeness is
incomplete,
my maturity, ashen.

My friend,
I hate you.
For outpacing me.
For your flights
in freedom.

I lie a
captive
of the song
we started together.

The skies quiver
announcing the
missing beats.

History can be recreated.

Can you father me,
my son,
see me through
my adolescence?

The truth is :
in the folds
of our singularities,
we meet the shadow
of the other,
The truth is :
we've shared the
twinkling conversions
of the stars, the same sun, and
the moon, in the same
frictive vibrations of
time.

JAMES SWAIN

BANARES SUITE

I

Come down to the ghats in the morning
where the cows and the bulls and the buffalo have lain the night through
expecting the sun and the city to rise and bathe in the river

Come down to the water where the wind is restless in the tight bazaars
making the streets yawn and squint under the bright sky
and sit on the whale boat turned turtle in the silt
buffalo watching over you, their horns and their mammy's faces moving in rumination

II

Husband and wife are down by the river
rubbing their feet on the wet stone steps to clean them
and soften the callous. She gathers her sari about her
like the petals of a lotus and steps down into the river.
He helps her, dashing her with white water from a brass lota
watching her cringe and fold in upon herself in the cold river
bobbing up and down until she looks long and streaming
like a slow brown smile. Now a young man sings her ascent
shaping his notes with his fingers
She takes new clothes from another, dressing openly secret
in sun and wind and water rooted like a young tree in the warm ground
where cattle watched for morning
Her husband caught up in worship stands waist deep in the river
his hands house the rising sun and his voice the flow of the water
of many pilgrims come down in the morning to bathe in the sun and the river.

III

Sky by sky cloud by cloud snow by snow fall by fall the
river grows more pure
Star by star stick by stick town by town the river is made
man

Who has encamped where the city burns its dead
and whose white dog pokes and nibbles in the ash of old
fires
running down to the water like black tongues?
He whose legs fold froglike beneath him
whose smooth body is powdered with ashes
all but the wrinkles around his eyes, perhaps he will tell
us:
but he is hardly breathing

You in the brown shawl and white chemise!
You there, that one, with the curly hair and the cheeks as
fat as a mango
He must know who comes and goes in the midst of all those
fires
You with the pockmark bindi, what do you know?
'The cost of pyres'

Who is this tricked out in a peaked red hat
with elephant ears and a stethoscope to boot?
He has many addresses in his book in French German English
Hindi Urdu
even in Sanskrit Latin and Attic Greek!
He is asking for my address, and because he is so fat and
jolly
and his crackbrained friend with a dead rat clutched in one
hand
and a trick box in the other hops and grimaces and looks so
bedlamish
there is nothing decent I can do but go along with the game
and give my name in fun
for he is a fellow collector

Sky by sky cloud by cloud snow by snow the river grows more pure
Star by star stick by stick town by town the river is made man

Do you like to meet the sight of people
like little islands with a good spring bubbling at the center?
'That pipe coming out of the muck is drinking water,' says our guide
Do you like to see the twigged limbs of beggars blossom pink and white?
'All those clothes spread out to dry are washed down stream from the sewer'
Are you taken in by the fat stomach and the empty bowl
and the dung cakes like Lord Buddha's belly?
'That woman hopes the urine of the cow will cure her lameness'
But see the little girl with the mina on a tau-shaped stick
She's going boating on the river with her brothers and her father and her sister
'And she's got rickets'
See that prostrate parakeet there on the stretcher?
'They dip the bodies in the river to purify them before they are burned'

Oh but porpoises are popular here on the West Bank
and the ducks are white, rounder and brighter and more clamorous in feeding
than the dogs that dig in the ashes,
and their donkey's voices are like those of men who have died on the East Bank
too close to the sun for worship, reborn to bear and bray

Sky by sky cloud by cloud snow by snow fall by fall the river grows more pure
Star by star stick by stick town by town the river is made man,
and who will go over to the islands with sweet springs
bubbling in amongst the trees
where the white ducks sing in their donkey's voices
too close to the sun for worship?

IV

To the right of Ganga up from the sea
back of the stalls where bindis are made
in the shapes of stars fruits wheels eyes or the pinked
leaves of mangos
is the house of God, the destroyer

It is hard to get at like the last gold orange
in amongst the leaves and branches of the parent tree
and I look in through a low brownstone grate,
for I may not go into the temple,
and I see the adze shaped feet of the pilgrims
in dhotis saris pajamas worn in stiff loops
sheathing the helves of the adzes, bent and at rest
in the house of God, the destroyer

As I turn from the grate a shop girl shuts her mouth upon a
sweet
and then sucks in her lower lip and frowns to see me
looking
or to get the last of the first sweet or to try not to smile
at what I cannot see
as eyes fingers toes erect a prentice turns a nut of gold
catching the last of the first of the sun in a delicate
bindi,
in a star a fruit a wheel an eye or the pinked leaf of a
mango
the sign of the stall where bindis are made
near the house of God, the destroyer

V

Come down to the ghats in the morning
where the cows and the bulls and the buffalo have lain the
night through
expecting the sun and the city to rise and bathe in the
river

Oh come down to the shore where the wind is restless in the
tight bazaars
making the streets yawn and squint under the bright sky
and sit on the whale boat turned turtle in the silt,
buffalo watching over you, their horns and their mammy's
faces
moving in rumination and the froth of their mouths, like
ivory.

RANA NAYAR

BREATHING SPACES

A road
from my heart
curls back to a village
Where an old peepul tree
stands guard
against the termites of time
In broad daylight
shades a sun-tanned child
And at night
ghosts of memory
dance in the hollow
A canopy stretched over a broken well
Cloying intensity of a mother's love
sometimes oozing
sometimes dripping
sometimes flowing into an onward stream
rushes through the green fields
Well-bounded
by a red-brick wall
Flushed with the anger
of a stern father
I could not stay rooted
like the peepul tree
and moved away
Leaving the green fields behind
the red-brick wall
a mere stain on my conscience
But I carried a little garden
in my heart
Where a white-rose blooms
by mid-night
When breathing spaces die
on the edge of my gas-chamber.

Rana Nayar

WHEN BHISHMA DIES...

Moment of flesh
is a crystallized thought
stuck
in the bowels of mind
Blood rushes headlong
giving a lie to all learning
Leaving a purple stain
on excremental morality
Haemorrhage of tradition
swirls through time
Another Bhishma
drops down dead
on the arrows of asceticism.

JATIN DAS

GREEN WOOD SEED

Shall we build a cottage
With sky-light
and open to the stars
beyond the city limits

We shall travel beyond
mountains and seas
We shall also take short walks
on forest paths quietly.

On our return we shall collect
pebbles and stones with cosmic markings
all earned saplings
to sow in our little garden
to make a forest
to sit under the shade
the pleasure is of simple things
let's live quietly in the woods
and produce a green wood child

You have the energy
I am the catalyst
we shall produce
a green-tree-free
raising to the sky.

T. RAVI CHANDRAN

RESERVED MOODS

If blessed are the meek, so are we,
Caring little for the heaven,
We are supposed to inherit;
Fearing less for the hell,
Where we suppose,
We shall find a place.

If greed is the cause of evil,
We need annihilation of our greed.

Our moods reserved,
For millenniums ahead,
We march unperturbed -
By history of shrieks, solitary graves,
Dried agonies and dragon-eyed prophecies.

Our greatness, not in journeys we begin,
But in sojourns we make,
Wherein we lose –
Our living garden of friends,
And ourselves.

Our grandeur proclaimed, not in oft-won battles,
But among the heaps of broken swords,
Wasted laurels which sway with colourless clouds,
Ring along with church bells,
And ambitions untold.

We await the day –
When we have to come down from our cliffs,
To bend, bow and accept;
Tramp across muddy rivers,
Leave our rudiments on cactus islands,
Rest our necks over an invisible altar,
Slow down, suffer to slow down and sink.

Our glory in our endurance,
Our genius in its sustenance,
For we know then –
We shall be better than
What we are now,
And so much better than
What we were once.

S. A. HAMID

THE BIRD

There was a bird in my heart
with rainbow plumes
And it fluttered and it chirped
purifying the blood.

I found and I lost
I sang and I cried
But it still kept on
removing the clots.

But then I started
to strangle it slowly
by building an air-conditioned cage
with armed sentinels at its gate.

The guns would threaten
at even a peep through the glass
I made the sentinels happy
and won thunderous applause

The tears froze slowly
the thumping nearly stopped
The nausea then started
and I vomitted dark blood.

Yes, I nearly killed the bird
and it's there in a corner
with its beak lost in its chest feathers
On the verge of collapse.

It's time now I took the turn
and broke the air-tight glass
So that it revives and spreads its wings
to envelop the sky.

E. M. SCHORB

LORCA DE PROFUNDIS

Like an elephant's trunk
cut off
my poetry trumpets blood
out of anger
as memory is drained in each
hoarse music
trumpets blood
like an elephant's trunk
cut off
for the helplessness of the mutilated
telling the dark history
of the ivory poacher's greed
& machete
that felled the musical beast
in a trade for money
potency for the limp
the erotic for the dull
but is merely the dust of the dead

like an elephant's trunk
cut off
my poetry trumpets blood
telling dark history

DARSHAN SINGH MAINI

TRANSLATING POETRY

Although the business and art of translating poetry is, in a certain sense, as old as poetry itself, and scores of volumes of verse get regularly translated into other languages as a matter of industry, inspiration and commitment, there's still a strong feeling among the critical pundits and purists that such an exercise—even the very best—is a literary extravagance, if not an impertinence. They seem to equate it with a kind of aesthetic profligacy and voyeurism on the one hand, with vampirism on the other. Few such theorists argue against the translation of creative works in prose, such as fiction, essay, biography etc., though at least one critic, David Lodge, has, in fact, tried valiantly in his *Language of Fiction* to keep even a certain type of novelist (Melville, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Joyce, Faulkner and Proust) out of the reach of the predatory and promiscuous translator. Since the novel he has in mind is basically poetic, deriving its energies from language and style, above all, it's not surprising that the objection to the translating of poetry subsumes in principle the objection to the prose variants. For even where a translation is evocative and brilliant and faithful, there's always a possibility of the achieved text springing a leak in the most unexpected place and in a most unexpected manner. This is because its rhetorical and sound structure is so integral and constitutive to its health and kinetics as to assume the rigour and discipline of verse. Still, a prose work, whatever its complexity, is, by and large, amenable to the imagination of rendition and redaction, and a translator may bring off a *tour de force*, as indeed Scott Moncrieff does in his astonishingly rich and effective translation of Marcel Proust's opus, *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, to silence the 'purist'. But the question of poetry at once raises some very fundamental issues— issues of entology, mimesis, lexicon, music etc. Obviously, an article of this nature and scope cannot take up these vaster issues of aesthetics and metaphysics, though to understand the nature of this nagging hostility to poetic translations one has first to understand the true nature of poetry. No wonder

Robert Frost in one of his famous aphorisms on poetry said that poetry is what's lost in translation.

It's not surprising that poetry *per se* preceded prose, particularly that prose which shows a high degree of mentation, argument, analysis and organisation. This is because it carries a whole freight of primitive emotions and archaic sentiments in the form of the Jungian 'archetypes', and is, at the same time, a most malleable medium for the expression of the irrational and the inexplicable in life. This is, of course, not to aver that poetry cannot be highly intellectual or erudite both in content and tone, and yet retain its essential 'quiddity'— its mysteriousness and its irrationality. In fact, in a nuclear manner, poetry shares with. mathematics certain principles of organisation, code and language as Scott Buchanan argued in *Poetry and Mathematics* as far back as 1929. But even this kind of formalism cannot fully explain the numinous appeal of poetry and the nature of its genesis. For, all theories of poetry from Plato to I.A. Richards and Harold Bloom seem to recognise the *sui generis* character of this genre— its power to penetrate the human reality, and render it in the form of pseudo statements, arbitrary symbols and magical effects. Above all, it's in its *structure* that poetry seems to carry its great energies, and the structure is more than a given sum of words and images. It has an absolutely irreversible aspect, and an absolutely ineluctable contingency. Poetry thus becomes by its very nature intractable, despite its suppleness otherwise. It assumes a 'god-like' authority, and, in its highest moments and reaches, touches the *logos*, as it were.

The controversy, therefore, about the *fundamental untranslatability of poetry* has at least an understandable aspect. Even such an insightful Marxian critic as Christopher Caudwell regards this aspect as constituting the very definition of poetry in his *Illusion and Reality*. However, even as he recognises the element of irrationality, magic and ambiguity in poetry, he precludes mystic or transcendental aspects. Poetry, for him, has a unique, inner logic which somehow fails to find a proper expression in translation. And he goes on to observe that "science yearns always toward mathematics, poetry towards music." Again, the element of dream-work in poetry which is often rooted in our tribal and

mythic consciousness, and the question of 'deep structures' which, as Chomsky demonstrates, inhere in all languages, make the business of translation, at best, an act of faith. There can never be the same structure of thoughts and words in another language, and so the translator is obliged to create a new semblable structure which, if its succeeds, may even violate the original structure as a condition of its operative power. That's why perhaps at one stage or another nearly all critics are driven to Mallarme's well-known argument that poetry is written "with words, not ideas". W.F. Bateson also holds that poetry is essentially "a verbal activity", and that it creates "non-logical patterns". This is not to suggest that ideas have no place in poetry. As Caudwell has rightly remarked, though poetry is composed of words, it evokes ideas as of necessity. Poetry then is words charged with meaning to the utmost, and when it's translated into another tongue, there's always a certain loss *en route*, for the words compacted into images carry a nimbus and a resonance which no translator may fully render. Poetry, it's rightly said, is a complex of unique words in a unique order, and though in a translated poem, one can create another, sometimes equally forceful, *ensemble* of words, its uniqueness will necessarily be of a different order, pitch and power. That's why perhaps one on the greatest translators and theoreticians of our time, Willard Trask, also believes that poetry could only be translated into prose, not into poetry. This, undoubtedly, is an extreme view, but it does show how the task of translating poetry is daunting enough to create an aesthetic bias against it.

However, whatever the argument of the 'purists', there's always a need to indulge in "the vanity of translation" if only to preserve the imperium of poetry as a universal heritage, and as man's greatest enterprise. Imagine for a moment a situation where Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe and Tagore, and scores of other great poets, not to speak of the *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Gita* and *Guru Granth*, remain unavailable to the peoples of the world except in their own tongues! It would amount to a kind of inverse imperialism, denying to mankind the best that has been thought and expressed in the human language. So, even when the translator can nowhere reach the heights of the 'Master',

he may, with luck and skill, come close enough to the essence of things. If, like Saul Bellow's Henderson, he cannot "reach as high as the face", he should be content to plant a "kiss somewhere lower down". The translator needs therefore to affirm his spiritual kinship as also his worshipful acceptance of a lower perch on Mount Parnassus. Indeed, it's only in this sense that translation can be poetry at all, for poetry as such involves an aesthetic of continual humilities and sacrifices, as T. S. Eliot contends. And the translating poet knows and values the limits of his exercise. He can stretch his own muses so far, and no further. Beyond that is the territory of the 'gods and he must learn to stop "where angels fear to tread"!

I would even suggest a kind of spiritual compact between the poet and the translator, a compact that's more a matter of intuitive perceptions and insights than of mere strategies. This would, in effect, mean that the two spirits have to be on the same wave-length even if their endowments are not of the same cut or quality. In short, it's only when a cognate or a collateral imagination begins to operate in full tide and empathy that a great poem begins to yield a part of its essence to the translating muses. And the more challenging and complex a task, the more does the responding imagination get baited and drawn into the mysteries of creation. It's then that a certain kind of translation becomes an act of *trans-creation*, and the end-product an aesthetic construct as fully authentic, within its constraints, as the original poem. One is tempted to suggest a poetics of translation.

To be sure, translating poetry is not just a question of 'mystic' affinities and echoes. It has a practical side to it, and one may not achieve the 'magical' effect without a considerable amount of artifice and poetic cunning. That's where the translator has to do a highly skilful balancing act involving at once daring and caution. A word, a phrase, a *caesura*, an *enjambment* can make or mar a poem, for each word not only carries a unique emotive charge, but also a unique mode of movement. By a flick of the imagination, as it were, a poetic *effect* may be created, and a word or a phrase gets invested with irony or ambiguity or epiphany, as the case may be. Essentially then,

the act of poetic translation demands 'a killer instinct', a certain kind of ruthlessness. A translator should instinctively know where and how the knife will fall. Or, to change the metaphor, he must know how to throw overboard all useless freight, and all such elements that seem to endanger the health and purity of a poem. It's only when he ceases to 'milk' the original poem and succeeds in establishing a natural rhythm that the new version will begin to breathe. As an American poet, Jack Gilbert, visiting India some years ago, said at a seminar, anyone in the business of poetry can make words hop and hoop, as he may seduce a young girl; it's the 'marriage' of words and mystery that's difficult to consummate. And that's precisely the ministry of the mediating muses. In a manner, then, the translating poet is "a priest of the eternal imagination", to recall Joyce's famous phrase, in the sense that he effects a 'marriage' as a matter of faith and ceremony and hope.

However, this marital metaphor should not lead us to believe that the performing 'priest' may never depart from the achieved text in any form. That's where the question of freedom, freshness and spirit assumes a nuclear importance in the art of translating poetry. And, in fact, this is a central issue in the controversy around the subject. Both the involved critics and the practising poets seem to be fairly evenly divided here. And it may be pertinent to cite the views of a couple of major poet-translators of our time, such as the Russian Pasternak or the American Robert Lowell.

Pasternak, who translated, among other poets, Shakespeare, and later jointly with his beloved Olga Ivinskya, Tagore, wrote to a Russian editor thus : "I am completely opposed to contemporary ideas about translation....I share the nineteenth century view of translation as a literary exercise demanding insight of a higher kind than that provided by a merely philological approach". Pasternak was, in short, wholly opposed to the literal versions favoured by some modern translators such as his compatriot, Nabokov, who while translating Pushkin remarked, "I have ruthlessly sacrificed manner to matter, and have attempted to give a literal rendering of the text as I understand it". Pasternak, in

fact, laid down the following guide-lines as reported by Olga Ivinskya in her memoir, *A Captive of Time :*

(1) Bring out the theme of the poem, its subject matter, as clearly as possible.

(2) Tighten up the fluid non-European form by rhyming internally, not at the end of the line.

(3) Use loose, irregular metres, mostly ternary ones. You may allow yourself to use assonances.

At the same time, Pasternak would not countenance any fanciful departures from the text. Nor did he favour any frills and flourishes for their own sake. That's how Ivinskya reports the matter : "He laughed at me for taking such liberties, and taught me how to preserve the sense by discarding words — how to strip an idea bare and clothe it in new words, as concisely as possible, without striving to prettify it. You had to pick your way gingerly along the boundary between translation in the strict sense and improvisation on the theme suggested by the original."

At the other end is a poet like Lowell whose renderings of European poets into English seem to constitute a new order of verse altogether. The very title *Imitations* would indicate that Lowell was attempting to go far beyond the discretionary line in his effort to recreate the poems of Baudelaire, Montale and others. In effect what he was doing constituted a radical new way of looking at the whole business of translating poetry. For him, then, such renderings were a new *mode of personal expression*, an extension of his own self. They became a medium for bringing into play not only his own poetic skill and strategies but also his own spiritual crises and emotional upheavals. That is to say, certain great poems of the European 'masters' ignited his muses in a coercive manner so that his own private anguish and public concerns became a part of the evolved classical culture. This kind of translation has something in common with the philosophy of literary criticism that the Geneva School propounds. It is then an adventure of the imagination in other territories and terrains, a quest for creative fulfilment at one

remove. At least one Lowell critic, Stephen Yenser, has gone on to describe *Imitations* as "an autobiography of the spirit".

In a couple of published interviews with Lowell, D.S. Carne-Rose, a distinguished critic and theorist of translation, observes that the poet's translation style was radically different from his own poetic style as such. In other words, Lowell wrote two types of verse, one that came out of him directly as a response to his own experiences in life, and another that flowed out of him when his imagination, roused and drawn, appropriated other poets' experiences and made them his own so to speak. Carne-Rose, while admiring Lowell's Baudelaire and Montale, still complains to him: "You somehow take possession of the original and dominate it".

This, then, is the danger when the responding muses take the bit in their mouth, and the translator knows not where and how to dismount. In such cases, the word 'translation' loses its putative meaning, and we have on our hands 'imitations', adaptations and improvisations. It's perhaps good to remember that at the minimal level, translation is "an operation performed on language : a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another," as C.J. Catford observes in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. But, at a higher level, there is a qualitative jump. As Jackson Mathews puts it, "One thing seems clear : to translate a poem is to compose another poem". Whether the new poem is as good as the original (Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* is often cited as a classic example) or a weaker version is then not as important as the question of the viability and truth of the new poem as a fresh construct. If something is lost *en route*, it's a matter that cannot perhaps be helped. After all, it's not easy to capture a rainbow or to contain an exotic perfume!

And finally, I take the liberty to reproduce in the following pages two Punjabi poems in translation to authenticate the view that though a translation should remain tethered to the text, it must allow for certain exertions of the imagination in the interests of intensity, rigour and compression. For the new poem is obliged to evolve its own true tone in a new order of words.

AMRITA PRITAM

SAYAL or WINTER

My life shivers and swoons,
And my lips are blue in sooth;
The cold climbs up in me
From the roots of my soul.

The clouds of years now thunder
Over the skies of my age,
And the flakes of hoary law
Are piling up in my place.

Should you come today,
Wading through muddy lanes,
I'll wash your feet
In a ceremony of hope.

O grant me a place in thy sun,
I'll creep out of my coverlet,
And warm old bones
On the embers of life.

I'll waft here and now
A palmful of the sun,
And slip a ray or two
In my frozen womb.

And thus perchance may end
The winter of my births and discontent.

(*Translated from Punjabi by Darshan Singh Maini*)

SHIV BATALVI

SHIKRA or THE HAWK

O Mother mine!
I made a hawk my love;
In its plum'd glory,
It ate out of my hand,
And its noonday beauty
Shone like a sun.
It pined for perfumes,
And born of a fair mother,
It put the roses to shame.
It scorn'd the mashed meal
I prepared with butter and cream,
And I fed it
With the flesh of my heart!
But behold! it vanish'd hence
In a sudden flight,
And never wing'd back to these parts!

(*Translated from Punjabi by Darshan Singh Maini*)

PREM KUMAR

MEN OF CLAY

As if they rose at the creak of dawn
And walked into the twilight zone
No hint of farewells in the dewy breeze
No sign of steps in the drifting sand
And so when the city woke up from daily trance
They were not seen on the roads
That sprawled like arteries going nowhere
And when the steel mill let out the siren
That summoned the workers to their machines
They were not at the guarded gates
When the housewives took the morning meal
To the fields, they were not there...

Yet they were not missed or remembered
Like the warriors of unclaimed wars
They were the spoils unsung by troubadours
For they fought not on the plains of Kurukshetra
But in the corn fields, factories, caves of Ajanta-Ellora
Equally loved by the blazing sun and icy stars
Never knew they triumphed in their defeats
And advanced in their retreats
They were no heroes nor martyrs
Who traversed from pity to compassion
For they had seen the arm of justice bent
Under the weight of tradition
And they too felt fear chilling the bone...

Yes, they were afraid
They were men of clay
Born to the earth, destined to wander
In their own orbit ceaselessly
And when they crossed those rivers
Walked through the woods, climbed the hills
Bits of their universe chipped away
For they were no crusaders

Who look death in the eye and smile
They were only men of clay
What lost causes, what broken dreams
Lured them away to distant lands?
They left no memories...

(*Translated from* Men of Clay, 1968, *a collection of Punjabi poems, by the author*)

ALL THOSE WORDS

Day after day
As dusk fell over dusty roads
We rushed to the caves
Far from the city
Passing the smoke-filled houses
That always yawned and groaned.
There we sat in our cave
Nervously, hiding self-pity,
Stale yearnings, impotent rage, uncertainty
Huddled in the warmth of our shame
We listened to the crickets or the rain
Pounding the old Bo tree
And nobody said a word ... all night long

What was it that lurked in our hearts
Or hung on the tip of our tongues?
Nobody said a word ... all night long
Perhaps we knew or thought we knew
That words are echoes born to die
And lie unburied in the caverns of the soul
And the horror of the body
Will flood the hollow of the night
So in mortal fear, speechless
We wrestled our shadows
And groped in the seedy silence
The still-born images that nobody claimed

And, thus, day after day
We fell prey
To our own fear and insecurity
Drawn by desire and naivety
To sing to a generation
Lost to its own battle hymns
We, the high priests of tormented words
Returned to our cave
To brood over weighty matters
That haunt in sleep and wakefulness
The questions that fuel the pain
Like only volcanoes know
And so nobody said nor heard
All those words...

(*Translated from Punjabi by the author*)

BHUPINDER PARIHAR

POEM AS CONTEXT

In the tumult of words,
In the theatre of a poem,
There breathe characters
in motley robes,
puny and potent,
The obvious is hard to see.

The sun sinks.
wrapped in moon-lit night
under a lamp-post
tired and broken
keen to die
no time to be lost,
a requiem for the day
a welcome for the night.

A vibrant shadow
flloating on a snowy bosom
eluding grasp,
threatening to vanish
expanding into a cosmos
truth, dream, fancy
who knows!

(*Translated from Urdu by the author*)

ON READING GHALIB

You do not ever roll anything
into an absolute,
words generate worlds.

Poised at the hub
of existence
ruminate utterances,
magnets of the soul.

They imitate, improvise
never to reach you.
you beckon
you defy.

Life unfolds to you
its secrets,
like dewed petals
a step beyond, you respond
leaving much unsaid
much unwritten,
all submerged within
a gap that gnaws
a language that fails.

(*Translated from Urdu by the author*)

DIVIK RAMESH

THE SURPLUS EGG

We are four,
And the eggs are five.
If there comes a decent guest,
We can very well
Treat him with the surplus egg,
Yes, we can.
But who cares to come?
Shilpa's Papa?
Never!
We alone keep visiting them
We alone keep visiting folks
All the time
And I wonder
If ever
Would someone note
That we also lay
Breakfast on the table at times
At times we do
Luxuriate in eggs
And at times we do not have
To fight shy of what we eat.
O, if ever Shilpa's father visits us,
We of course, would
Treat him with eggs.

(*Translated from Hindi by Anami ka*)

ON THE CANVAS OF THE SKY

The Divine painter
With its playful brush
Outlines clouds
On the canvas
Of the sky,
And you're off just because
I couldn't open forth
A love poem
Despite all your love
That I'm blessed with.
Aren't you? You're off.
My - my!
But how can I
Crystallise that in mere words
Which I hold like a dream in my eyes?
How can I cut to size
That which I sip and absorb in the soul?
Poems can't be reduced to
Mere words after all.
Isn't poetry a failed quest
Of the language
In which we meet
And greet
Each other
Like waves.
Isn't poetry a way to the river
It fails to bind forth?

(*Translated from Hindi by Anami ka*)

BALACHANDRAN CHULLIKAD

REALIZATION

It's on my heart
that the hunter
sharpens the arrow;
still, the sharpness
of the edge isn't seen
in my poems.

The cartridges are emptied
on my chest itself;
still, the music
of the barrel
is missing
from my poems.

It's my very flesh
that's crushed
under the hoofs;
yet my words lack
the deadly speed
of war horses.

It's my shoulder bones
that are battered;
still, my ideas
don't perspire
like those who carry
the palanquin.

It's my dreams
that are aflame;
still, my poem
doesn't become
red-hot.

When I spend
a turbulent night
traversing down
memory lane
I get enlightenment.

A day will come
when our people
will roar through
the singer.

We don't want
intoxicating couplets;
give us blood thirsty
slogans.
Yes.
Then they will stop
religious songs
and sing
songs of change.
Instead of lamentations
they will read
fiery words.

(*Translated from Malayalam by O. T. J. Menon*)

ULŌCANĀR

LITTLE GROUPS

In little groups
and in crowds, leering
at me out of the corners
of their eyes, and touching
their fingers to their noses
in contempt, my neighbours
are whispering!
And mother! She
struck me!

But tonight
he's coming
in his fine chariot
he's forcing fast horses
to fly even faster,
horses whose beautiful backs
have the smells of the flowers
they brushed in the backwaters,

and I have decided

to go with him.

This stupid village
can just sit here
and gossip!

(*Translated from Tamil*, Narrinai 149, *by David C. Buck*)

MARAN PORAYANĀR

SANDCASTLE

I watched the cool flowers
in the grove where he
left me

mascara eyelids closed
on my red eyes
and squeezed out
my tears.

Mother came:
"What happened?"

"The sea just ruined
my sandcastle."

(*Translated from Tamil,* Aintinai Aimpatu 44, *by David C. Buck*)

MĒTTĀ

TO THE FATHER OF OUR NATION

1974

Your pictures ride
in all the parades
Why do you stand
in the street
with your head
down?

On this holy day
they repaint
the nation's
faded image

O father
of our nation!

When I see
the peace
residing
in your statues
I have to cry.

In the heat
of my tears
my poem
ends without
ending.

O Āputtiraṉ,* seeking
refuge after the ships sank
in the ocean
of tears!

**Āputtiraṉ : a character in* Manimekalai, *a Classical Tamil epic by Seetalai Sātanār.*

You gave us
the nectar-bowl.
Now what we hold
in our hands is
the begging bowl.

Who are the sorcerers
who manipulated
this change?
Who can unravel
the shadow
within a shadow?

We tended goats
for you.
As the years passed, we
have turned into
a herd of goats:

they ignore
our stomachs
and adore our
udders.

We sin alone
but there are enough
holy places for us all
to absolve our guilt
together.
And so
our sons of India
stay
pure.

When they donned
their flowered crowns
in the Presidency,
salty petals dropped
from the small shrubs
of ghetto children's
eyes.

They who
spun your carka
our home made weapon
now
spin their threads
of gold.

To us
silver and gold
come only
in the names
of jubilees.

There is only one way
our people still follow you
precisely,
we're half
naked.

To look at the way
the country is going,
it looks as though
the birthday suit
will become our
national dress.

Water released
from the dams
betray the valleys
and flow
to the hilltops.

Knowing you would walk
only in the ghettos
your chēlas turned
the whole nation
into a ghetto.

The sorcerers
who manipulated
these changes
we now
garland.

Your pictures ride
in all the parades.
Why do you stand
in the street
with your head
down?

I hear your lament
for this fledgling
nation.
In the heat
of my tears
my poem
ends without
ending.

(*Translated from Tamil by R. Nedumaran and David C. Buck*)

THIRUVALLUVAR

TIRUKKURAL

Where did she get this fire that burns when I leave her,
and cools me when I come?

(1104)

For two in love it is delicious when even a breath
cannot cleave their closeness.

(1108)

Shed lust, or shed shame, my heart!
I cannot stand both.

(1247)

I do hide my lust. But without warning,
like a sneeze, it erupts.

(1253)

(Translated from Tamil by David C. Buck)

"DEVADEVAN" (PIKCHUMANI KAIVALLYAM)

HE ROLLED

(Pikchumani Kaivallyam (b 1948), a High School teacher, writes poetry under the pseudonym "Devadevan". A short story writer and critic, he has published four volumes of poetry.

He rolled.
The sand particles
that stuck to his side
left the earth,
lost their vigour,
languished.
The merciful branches
fanned to compensate
the burning heat
of the shabby shade.
The wind dried
the sand particles,
shook them down.
The earth
unable to swallow him alive
presses the other side
of his body.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

THE AVENUE

The avenue that ran
not able to bear the heat
heaved, stood
in the shade of a tree.
Slowly the avenue moved.
And I stood puzzled,
forgetting the slow walk
and the destination.
The march of trees on either side
not disturbing the people.
The conference of trees
in the forest.
A chorus of slogans
from the trees:
"We need rains"
Wishing for rains
branches scratch the sky.
Wishing for water
roots scratch the earth.
In the downpour
trees, avenue and I
get drenched.
The shell of the sprouting seed
is torn.
My wet chappals break.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

THE TRUE FORM OF GOD

The waterfall leaps down
on the rocks,
and on the earth
where peep new sprouts
the sky sprinkles water
like a garden-can.

The faggot-bundle
a labourer carries on his head
protects him from the fire
of the sun.

An uncared for temple
with tower, corridors,
tall outer walls
goes to rack and ruin
thanks to the roots of the trees
growing from the scattered seeds.
There rises
the true form of God.
The poet cooks:
In an open space in the forest
he buries three bricks –
Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow –
puts up an oven.
A sudden downpour.
The fire is not put out;
it burns still.
The cooking vessel offers protection.
And there is fire
in the midst of water.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

S. VAIDYANATHAN

A WINDOW

(S. Vaidyanathan (b 1957) works in the Madras Refineries, Manali, Madras. Contributes to little journals.)

Behind the screen of eyelashes
a window.
Through it is seen
a twisting, turning foot-track,
noiseless
like a light-spitting star.
Mirrors reflecting faint smiles
brim with cruelty
locked up all around.
The small wave embraces the big;
The deep sea ever there.
He –
heart weighing down –
learns the language
to write a poem
some other day.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

M. V. SATHYAN

A SEARCH FOR THE FACE

(M. V. Sathyan (b 1961), the youngest of the leading Tamil poets. Publication : 'Revisions in Manuscript'.)

In yesterday's dream
I kissed a deadman.
He resembled me.
Seeing my image in him
I struggled to rip off
The mask I wear.
I stubbed the cigarette out,
Felt like a grasshopper
That didn't shriek
Even when its legs were torn off.
I always wish to write my name
In the new book I buy.
But I disappear
In the blare
Of a speeding fire-engine.
I shred the flower petals,
Try to identify my face
In the midst of the crowd.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

K. ANANDH

CURIOUS THINGS

(K. Anandh (b 1951) Poet, short story writer, critic, novelist. Publications include a book of poems and a novel.)

When I saw all kinds
Of curious things
I began to gather them.

A well-wrought shell,
A crystal reflecting colours,
A sculpture — a woman's face.

I collected, went on collecting
Whatever I felt to be curious.
The entire house was filled up.
No more space.

The wonder of the world
Revolving in space
Like a sphere no one made.

Not only what is visible
Is marvellous;
What is invisible
Is also so.

Marvellous is the scene,
Also the one who sees it.

Curious things
Filled up all the space.
Now
which of these needs to be removed
And placed where?

Not only curious things,
The very thing that is curious
Is itself a marvel.

[*Translated from Tamil by M. S. Ramaswami*]

MICHAEL LOCKWOOD AND A. VISHNU BHAT

THE VICTORIANIZATION OF ŚĀKUNTALA

'Fondling', she saith, 'since I have hemm'd thee here
Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:
Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.
—W.S.

The above, metaphorical passage from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is relatively easy for the reader to interpret. Kālidāsa, however, is not so explicit in the ślōka recited by the Sūtradhāra, early in the prologue of his play, *Śākuntala;* and its *dhvani* has not been grasped :

Subhaga-salilāvagāhāḥ pāṭala-saṁsargi-surabhi-vana-vātāḥ/
Pracchāya sulabha-nidrā divasāḥ pariṇāma-ramaṇīyāḥ//3//

The full śṛṅgāric dimensions of this passage, as well as of the whole prologue together with the Nāndī ślōka, appear to have been lost sight of a long time ago, for Sanskrit commentators do not discuss them. Neither have W.T. Jones and later translators noted the pungent suggestiveness in the passages leading up to the play proper. The śṛṅgāra rasa is dominant in this play, and many are the words throughout the prologue which are charged with dramatic irony, resonating in powerful parallelism with later erotic passages in the play proper.

Consider the opening stanza, the Nāndī ślōka:

Yā sṛṣṭiḥ sraṣṭur-ādyā vahati vidhihutaṁ yā havir-yā ca hōtrī
Yē dvē kālaṁ vidhattaḥ śruti-viṣaya-guṇā yā sthitā vyāpya viśvam/
Yām-āhuḥ sarva-bīja-prakṛtir-iti yayā prāṇinaḥ prāṇavantaḥ
Pratyakṣābhiḥ prapannas-tanubhir-avatu vas-tābhir-aṣṭābhir-īśaḥ//1//

The most potent idea introduced here is that of 'Sacrifice'. And there are two important levels of suggestiveness. First, there is the Sacrifice dealt with in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the *Ṛg-Vēda:* Cosmic Creation. Second, there is the 'sacrifice' of the sexual act: Pro-creation—also dealt with in the *Ṛg-Vēda*, as well as in later works.

The Nāndī begins with a reference to that which is the first, the foremost creation of the Creator (*'Yā sṛṣṭiḥ sraṣṭur-ādyā...'*) —a clause which suggests the Waters (the Female) at the cosmic level and Śakuntalā, the daughter of an Apsarā, at the erotic-pro-creative level in this play. Next there is a reference to that which conveys the oblation according to rules (*'...vahati vidhihutaṁ yā havir-...'*)—a clause which suggests Fire (the Male) at the cosmic level and Duṣyanta, the conveyor of the oblation (semen), at the erotic-procreative level in the play.

The Waters and the Fire, together, constitute the fundamental creative force in the cosmos, and these two elements were visualized by the *Ṛg-Vēdic* seer as forming a *mithuna* (sex pair). The principle of Fire at three different levels—heaven, mid-region, and the earth–was the Male; and the Waters, at these three levels, were the Female. Further, these two principles were visualized as uniting at each of these three levels. The result was the fructification of the Female at all three levels.

The first two clauses of the Nāndī of the *Śākuntala* are, therefore, suggestive of the *Ṛg-Vēdic* idea of the union between the 'Waters' and the 'Fire', as well as of the sacrificial aspect of sexual 'union' spoken of in the Brāhmaṇa texts.

Fulfilling the recommendation made in the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* that the Nāndī should hint at the characters in the play proper, we have noted that these two clauses allude to Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, implicitly identified, respectively, with the Waters and the Fire—the two eternal creative principles.

In the second clause, which alludes to King Duṣyanta, the word *'vidhihutam'* ('according to rule or law') has at this implied level of meaning a satirical, ironic edge to it, for the king, in the third Act, is going to try to justify his impetuous

attempt to seduce Śakuntalā by appealing to 'the Law'! When the king catches hold of Śakuntalā's garment, she warns him, asking him to behave himself—there are ascetics wandering around. But the king replies:

> *Bhīru alaṁ guru-jana-bhayēna / Dṛṣṭvā tē viditadharmā tatra-bhavān-na tatra dōṣaṁ grahīṣyati kulapatiḥ/ Api ca—*
>
> *Gandharvēṇa vivāhēna bahvyō rājarṣi-kanyakāḥ/*
>
> *Śrūyantē pariṇītās-tāḥ pitṛbhiś-cābhinanditaḥ.//*
>
> *Timid girl, enough of your fear of elders! When he learns of what you have done, His Holiness [Kaṇva], a great teacher who knows the truth of the Law, will not find fault with you. For—*
>
> *Many daughters of royal sages*
> *were wed according to Gāndharva rites*
>
> *And, one hears, joyfully*
> *accepted by their fathers.*

But after mouthing these brave words, King Duṣyanta, finding himself out in the open light, lets go of Śakuntāla and beats a retreat into the shady cover of the forest!

We have seen, thus, how various phrases in the Nāndī ślōka can be understood to suggest certain characters and situations in the play proper (and, of course, in the prologue, too).

But some modern scholars have had reservations about this mode of interpretation:

Monier Williams (1876), speaking about what one of the 'ancient' commentators had to say about the Nāndī of the *Śākuntala:*

> Śaṅkara, with far-fetched subtility, points out how each of these types of Śiva [i.e., forms of Śiva] is intended by the poet to correspond with circumstances in the life of Śakuntalā.[1]

C. R. Devadhar (1934) warns that the Nāndī's

> characteristic of suggesting the story of the drama has led commentators into ingenious attempts to find out fantastic allusions to the main elements or incidents of the drama.[2]

Unfortunately, failure to seek out the allusions suggested by elements in the Nāndī ślōka and in the prologue reduces one to the level of the more naive members of the audience (or readers) of these inherently sophisticated works of art.

According to us, the Sūtradhāra and the Naṭī are to be 'born again' in the play proper as the hero and heroine, and, thus, their conversation in the prologue foreshadows their intense passion in the play proper. With this metadramatic relationship kept in mind, let us examine the *dhvani* in the prologue in some detail.

Immediately following the Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra's opening speech, to his 'wife', the Naṭī (*'Āryē! Yadi nēpathya-vidhānam-avasitam, itas-tāvad-āgamyatām'*—*'Lady, if you have finished dressing, please come here'*), strikes an ancient śṛṅgāric note intertwined with itself (Speech) :

> *Uta tvaḥ paśyan na dadarśa vācaṁ*
> *Uta tvaḥ śṛṇvan na śṛṇōtyēnam /*
> *Uto tvasmi tanvaṁ visasrē jyāyēva*
> *Patya uśatī suvāsaḥ//*
> (*Ṛg-Vēda*, X:71.4)

> *One [man], indeed, beholding Speech has not seen her; another hearing her has not heard her; but to another she delivers her person in the same way a passionate wife, beautifully attired, gives herself to her husband.*

The Naṭī enters, and the Sūtradhāra tells her that they are going to put on a new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam', by Kālidāsa, so let every actor be well prepared.

The Naṭī replies :

> *Suvihida-ppa'ō'adā'ē ajjassa ṇa kiṁ 'vi parihā' issadi /*
> [Suvihita-prayōgatâyaryasya na kim-api parihāsyatē/]

Because of your masterly 'performance', sir, nothing will appear ridiculous.

At one level of meaning—the obvious one—the Naṭī is praising the 'expert directorial skills' (*'suvihita-prayōga'*) of the Sūtradhāra. But the Naṭī (whose *alter ego* is Śakuntalā) is, through the same expression, also playfully praising the skills in the art of love-making possessed by the Sūtradhāra (whose *alter ego* is Duṣyanta). We are to witness the 'dressed'–rehearsal of his skills in love-making towards the end of the third Act.

The Sūtradhāra's response continues the double level of meaning established by the Naṭī:

Āryē! Kathayāmi tē bhūtārtham —

Ā paritōṣād-viduṣāṁ na sādhu manyē prayōga-vijñānam/
Balavad-api śikṣitānām-ātmany-apratyayaṁ cētaḥ //2//

Dear, to tell you the truth —

Unless the learned ones are completely satisfied,
A performance cannot be considered good.

For, however expert one may be,
There still lurks in the mind a sense of diffidence. (2)

At the surface level, the Sūtradhāra is modestly deferring to the learned members of the audience the judgment of his directorial skills. At the implied level of meaning, however, he is expressing diffidence about his love-making skills, which are soon to be tested in his role of King Duṣyanta. And the 'learned ones' who must be completely satisfied at this level are the holy sages, and, in particular, the sage, Kaṇva.

The Naṭī then wants to know what should be done next, and the Sūtradhāra asks her to entertain the audience by singing a song about the summer season which has just commenced,

When plunging deep into water's a pleasure,
When the trumpet flower adds to the fragrance of the forest breeze,
When deep-shade induced sleep
At the end of a playful day is heavenly. (3)

This stanza recited by the Sūtradhāra, which obviously praises the pleasures of nature in early summer, has also a frankly sexual level of implied meaning. The element *'bhaga'* in the word *'subhaga'* is suggestive, especially when modifying the expression 'plunging deep into water' (*'salilāvagāhaḥ'*). The trumpet flower (*'pāṭala'*) has its own sexual connotation. Again, the passage, 'deep-shade induced sleep at the end of a playful day', has a resonance with the love 'episode' towards the end of Act Three.

The Naṭī then sings a song :

Ìsīsi- cuṁbi'ā'iṁ bhamarēhiṁ su'umāra-kēsara-sihā'iṁ /
[Īṣad-īṣac-cumbitāni bhramaıaiḥ sukumāra-kēsara-śikhāni/]
Ōdaṁsayaṁti da'amāṇā pamadā'o sirīsa-kusumā' iṁ //4//
[Avataṁsayanti dayamānāḥ pramadāś-śirīṣa-kusumāni//]

Softly, softly, bees kiss
The filament's tender crest

Of the śirīṣa flower
Adorning gentle, sensuous women. (4)

This verse, at its surface level of meaning, speaks of bees, and of śirīṣa flowers adorning women—conventionally understood as adorning their ears.

Barbara S. Miller, in her essay introducing the plays of Kālidāsa, has this to say about the effect of the Naṭī's song:

> In the prologue of the *Śākuntala*, the director and the audience are so enchanted by the actress's song of summer that they are transported beyond mundane concerns. On awakening, the director recognizes its effect:
>
> The mood of your song's melody
> carried me off by force,
> just as the swift dark antelope
> enchanted King Duṣyanta.[3]

Miller's observation on the effect of the actress's song—'being transported beyond mundane concerns'—appears to put the emphasis on some transcendent aspect of the beauty of nature. But it is not just the birds and the bees which are carrying away the Sūtradhāra/Duṣyanta and the learned audience. It is, in large measure, the strong current of eroticism which runs through the prologue which has this effect.

One level of implied meaning in the Naṭī's song is easily understood: the bee=a passionate human lover kissing gently his beloved. But what exactly does the parallel suggest? Is the lover kissing her lips? Her ear? Or the flower decorating her ear? (Despite this seeming indefiniteness, the dramatic irony here clearly hints at the episode in the first Act where Śakuntalā [the Naṭī], wearing a *flower* on her ear, is pestered by a bee, and the king [the Sūtradhāra] reveals himself and comes to her rescue—and at other episodes, such as Queen Hamsavatī's song at the beginning of Act Five.)

As it is the Naṭī who first injects sexual suggestiveness into their conversation, and as the Sūtradhāra then raises this suggestiveness to a pitch in Verse 3, we feel that it is not just the above mentioned two levels of meaning in the Naṭī's song which has the effect of transfixing the mind of the Sūtradhāra, and of everyone else in Kālidāsa's theater.

The basic image of a śirīṣa flower tucked above the ear as an adornment of women has various sexually suggestive elements in it: the orifice of the ear, the flower metaphor, and the detail of its filament's tender crest (at the top of the 'ear'). The Naṭī's bee, thus, seems to be well acquainted with an advanced technique of the *Kāmasūtra.*

This multi-layered expression of erotic passion is then condensed into the word *'rāga'* used by the Sūtradhāra:

Ahō! Rāga-baddha-citta-vṛttir-ālikhita iva sarvato raṅgaḥ |

Ah, your passion/melody has transfixed the mind, the whole body of this theater is motionless, as in a painting!

The *dhvani* condensed in the single word *'rāga'*, here, is amplified and expressed in two words, *'gīta-rāgēṇa'*, in the verse of the Sūtradhāra's following line:

Tavāsmi gīta-rāgēṇa hariṇā prasabhaṁ hṛtaḥ |
Ēṣa rājēva Duṣyantaḥ sāraṅgēṇātiraṁhasā ||5||

I am carried away by the haunting, passionate melody of your song,
As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

In this verse, the Sūtradhāra explains his absentmindedness—his forgetting that he is putting on the play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'. This forgetfulness, of course, foreshadows the curse's effect in his role of Duṣyanta.

What we wish to analyze, now, are the tenses (of verbs) used in three recent translations of the last two lines of the prologue:

Michael Coulson's (1981) :

ACTRESS But you've already announced that we're to do a new play called 'Śakuntalā and the Love Token'!

DIRECTOR My goodness, so I had. For the moment I'd quite forgotten. In fact

I was as swept away
By the enchantment of your song
As King Dushyanta here
Drawn on and on by the swift-fleeing deer.[4]

Barbara S. Miller's (1984) :

ACTRESS : But didn't you just direct us to perform a new play called *Śakuntalā and the Ring of Recollection?*

DIRECTOR : Madam, I'm conscious again! For a moment I forgot.

The mood of your song's melody
carried me off by force,
just as the swift dark antelope
enchanted King Duṣyanta.[5]

Chandra Rajan's (1989) :

ACTRESS : Why, Sir, what you mentioned right at the beginning—the new play entitled *The Recognition* of *Śakuntalā*.

DIRECTOR : You do well to remind me, dear lady. Indeed, my memory failed me for an instant; because,

> I was carried far, far away, lured
> by your impassioned song, compelling,...
> even as the King, Duḥsanta here,
> was, by the fleet fleeing antelope.[6]

All these three scholars have used the past tense in translating the construction, *'Tavāsmi...hṛtaḥ'* :

Coulson : 'I *was* as *swept away*'.

Miller : 'The mood...*carried me off*'.

Rajan : 'I *was carried* far, far *away*'.

But this past action must then be compared with an action which is continuing into the present : King Duşyanta is just about to enter on the stage pursuing the antelope.

Therefore, all three translators falter when they are led by their choice of the past tense in translating *'Tavāsmi...hṛtaḥ'* into also using the past tense—or implying its use—in the second half of the comparison :

Coulson : 'As King Dushyanta here [*was swept away*]
Drawn on and on by the swift-fleeing deer.'

Miller : 'just as the swift dark antelope
enchanted King Duşyanta.'

Rajan : 'even as the King, Duḥsanta here,
was [*carried away*] by the fleet fleeing antelope.'

The question of tense here is not an issue of just pedantic, limited consequence. This question lies at the very heart of the interpretative framework one uses (knowingly or unknowingly) in the attempt to translate (or understand) this play. The Sūtradhāra has to move from a statement of an action in the past ('I *forgot*') to a statement of an action continuing into the present ('As King Duṣyanta, here, *is being carried away*' [present continuous], '*...is carried away*' [present], or '*...has been carried away*' [present perfect tense]).

For those readers, or translators, who do not understand that the Sūtradhāra's *alter ego* is Duṣyanta, the Sūtradhāra's 'being carried away' ends with his recovering his memory, and thus is an action which is interpreted and translated as past and completed ('I *was carried away*'). However, our metadramatic framework of interpretation is quite different. The Naṭī's song should be understood as casting a powerful, long lasting spell on her husband.[7] This spell, as it were, transforms him into King Duṣyanta, and its effect lasts throughout the play proper, only ending when, in the capacity of Sūtradhāra--having given up the role of king—he recites the Bharatavākyam at the close of the drama. The learned audience in Kālidāsa's day would also have experienced the power of the Naṭī's spell and have enjoyed this transformation of Sūtradhāra into hero, of Naṭī into heroine—of drama into metadrama.

We give, here, the text of these two lines, and our translation:

NAṬĪ Ṇaṁ ajja-missēhiṁ paḍhamaṁ ēvva aṇṇattam Ahiṇṇāṇa-Sa'uṁdalaṁ ṇāma apuvvaṁ ṇāḍa aṁ pa'o'ē adhikarī'adu'tti |

SŪTRADHĀRAḤ Ārye! Samyaganubhodhitôsmi | Asminksaṇe vismṛtaṁ khalu mayā | Kutaḥ –

Tavāsmi gīta-rāgēṇa hāriṇā prasabhaṁ hṛtaḥ |
Ēṣa rājēva Duṣyantaḥ sāraṅgēṇātiraṁhasā ||5||

NAṬĪ But the honorable ones already ordered a performance of the unprecedented, new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'.

SŪTRADHĀRA Dear, it's good you've reminded me. For a moment, indeed, I forgot. For

I am carried away by the haunting, passionate melody of your song,
As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

To state the last ślōka more explicitly :

I am enchanted by the haunting, passionate melody of your song,
(And transformed into) King Duṣyanta, here, (enchanted) by the swift running antelope.

Eroticism runs through this transformation as a thread of continuity—a point which has been clearly made by Chandra Rajan :

> The chase is a central motif in Act 1; the King is not merely chasing a deer, he is after a girl. The deer is closely associated with Śakuntalā through imagery and it leads the King into her world.... The chase motif is picked up in Act 2 where we come across several phrases pertaining to the sport of hunting: the hunter's skill; his elation when he gets the quarry.... All of these phrases conveying as they do the sense of dominance over the prey and gaining possession of it, characterize the initial attitude to and relation of Duḥsanta with Śakuntalā.[8]

The importance of being aware of the metadramatic transformations, first, from Nāndī ślōka to prologue, and then from prologue to play proper, lies in the resulting revelation of such elements of continuity which run through the play. If it is seen that the element of eroticism is firmly established in embryo form in the Nāndī of the *Śākuntala*, and then that this element is articulated and intensified in the prologue, we should certainly expect to see it reach its full-blown form in the play proper.

Now, touching on this very expectation is one of the major debates among scholars concerning the play, 'Abhijñāna-

Śākuntalam': the dispute over the relative genuineness of various manuscript versions which have come down to us. The two main contenders for the crown of authority are, today, the so-called 'Bengālī' and 'Devanāgarī' recensions.

Sir William Jones's pioneering translation of the play in 1789 was based on the Bengālī version. Monier Williams, nearly a century later, preferred the Devanāgarī version. Monier Williams suspected the copyists in Bengal of interpolating passages:

> ...the copyists in Bengal have been Paṇḍits whose *cacoëthes* for amplifying and interpolating has led to much repetition and amplification. Many examples might here be adduced; but I will only refer to the third Act of the Bengālī recension, where the love-scene between the King and Śakuntalā has been expanded to four or five times the length it occupies in the MSS. of the Deva-nāgarī recension.[9]

Barbara S. Miller, writing more recently, would give support to Monier Williams's suspicion :

> ...the most prominent difference between the two recensions [the Devanāgarī and Bengālī] is the so-called śṛṅgāric elaboration that occurs in the final scene of Act Three in the Bengali Recension (Pischel 3.29-38). This prolonged erotic dialogue between the king and Śakuntalā adds nothing to the *rasa* of the act, but one can imagine its insertion into the play to please some patron. The verses are not among the best of the play... and the entire dialogue shows a lack of subtlety.[10]

But other contemporary scholars, such as Chandra Rajan and Michael Coulson, who have chosen to base their translations of the *Śākuntala* on the Bengālī recension, think differently. Chandra Rajan writes :

> One can argue that the Bengal text is more satisfying, aesthetically. The longer and more numerous prose passages and the additional verses result in a smoother narrative and fuller characterization. The differences between the

> two recensions are found mainly in Act 1 and 3; they are particularly significant in the love episodes which the Devanāgarī treats in a rather perfunctory manner.[11]

We agree with Chandra Rajan. And our own position is that the Devanāgarī recension is a truncated, expurgated version of the 'original' text. The erotic elements hidden in the Nāndī-embryo, protected by *dhvani*, were, in the prologue-foetus, allowed to develop and become articulated because they were still protected by a veil of suggestiveness. But when these elements saw the light of day, *post-partum*, shorn of their protection, they suffered disfiguring amputation at the hands of the Devanāgarī copyists.

We have intended to use the word 'Victorianization', which appears in the title of this paper, only in its metaphorical sense, of course. In this sense it represents a reaction which began more than a thousand years ago and resulted in 'trimmed' texts of the *Śākuntala* and a certain 'blindness' on the part of commentators concerning the erotic implications of various passages in the play—especially in the Nāndī and in the prologue's dialogue.

One final note: in the last three acts, eros has been tempered by suffering and separation. Towards the end of the seventh Act, when Duṣyanta is reunited with Śakuntalā, and falls at her feet in remorse, she asks him to rise and says to him that their suffering must have been due to some wrong-doing of hers in a previous birth. From a metadramatic perspective, Ṣakuntalā's reference to some wrong-doing in a 'previous birth' suggests to us, at one level, the earlier period in her life (portrayed in the first three acts and the beginning of the fourth) when she falls in love with King Duṣyanta, submits to him, and then in the distraction of love, *unknowingly* incurs the wrath of the sage Durvāsas. Her 'wrong-doing' is hidden from her. At a deeper metadramatic level, however, 'previous birth' may also be taken as referring to the role of her *alter ego* (the Naṭī) in the prologue. The irony of this implication is striking. If Śakuntalā could only pierce the metadramatic barrier and remember the passion she felt, and the sexually suggestive language she used, in her previous incarnation as the Naṭī, she would indeed blush!

NOTES

1. *Śākuntala*, edited by Monier Williams (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1876), p.2.

2. *The Works of Kālidāsa*, Vol. 1, edited by C. R. Devadhar (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986 [1934]), p. 178. We have published two papers which attempt to show how, in the Nāndī of a classical Sanskrit drama, the elements of suggestiveness provide threads of continuity which run throughout the play: "Sanskrit Drama—Its Continuity of Structure", *Madras Christian College Magazine* (1988-89), Vol. 55, pp. 41-45; and "Nāṭya-Yajña (Drama as Sacrifice)", *M.C.C. Magazine* (1989-90), Vol. 56, pp. 17-21. A third, related paper, "Metatheater and Sanskrit Drama", is to appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Saṁskṛita Raṅga Annual*. This last paper includes a select bibliography of over 75 entries which 'more or less deal with *metadrama* and *metatheater*'.

3. *Theater of Memory : The Plays of Kālidāsa*, edited by B. S. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 28.

4. *Three Sanskrit Plays*, translated by Michael Coulson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 42.

5. Miller, p. 90.

6. *Kālidāsa : The Loom of Time*, translated by Chandra Rajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books [India], 1989), pp. 170-71.

7. This is expressed very nicely in Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990 [1951]), p. 148:

> Kāma is of the essence of magic, magic of the essence of love; for among nature's own spells and charms that of love and sex is pre-eminent. This is the witchcraft that compels life to progress from one generation to the next, the spell that binds all creatures to the cycle of existences, through deaths and births.

8. Chandra Rajan, p. 16.

9. Monier Williams, p. vii.

10. B. S. Miller, pp. 335-36.

11. Chandra Rajan, p. 14.

ABHIJÑĀNA-ŚĀKUNTALAM

The Foremost creation of the Creator;
the carrier of the oblation according to rules ;
The form of the sacrificer ; those two who create time;
that element which pervades the universe, whose attribute is sound;
That which people say is the source of all beings;
and that which is the very breath of all living creatures—
Through these eight perceptible forms,
may the Lord protect you! (1)

(*After the Invocation, enter the Sūtradhāra*)

1. SŪTRADHĀRA (*Looking back-stage*) Lady, if you have finished dressing, please come here.

2. ACTRESS (*Entering*) Sir, here I am.

3. SŪTRADHĀRA Dear, this audience is full of learned people. And we're presenting a new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam', whose plot has been composed by Kālidāsa. Therefore, let every actor be well prepared.

4. ACTRESS Because of your masterly 'performance', sir, nothing will appear ridiculous.

5. SŪTRADHĀRA Dear, to tell you the truth—

Unless the learned ones are completely satisfied,
A performance cannot be considered good.

For, however expert one may be,
There still lurks in the mind a sense of diffidence. (2)

6. ACTRESS Sir, let it be. Just give the command what should be done next, sir.

7. SŪTRADHĀRA What else but delight the ears of the members of this audience. Sing a song about the summer season that has just begun and is still enjoyable,

When plunging deep into water's a pleasure,
When the trumpet flower adds to the fragrance of the forest breeze,
When deep-shade induced sleep
At the end of a playful day is heavenly! (3)

8. ACTRESS Surely. (*She sings*)

Softly, softly, bees kiss
The filament's tender crest

Of the śirīṣa flower
Adorning gentle, sensuous women. (4)

9. SŪTRADHĀRA Well sung, dear! Ah, your melody has transfixed the mind, the whole body of this royal theater is motionless, as in a painting! What play are we going to put on now to please it?

10. ACTRESS But the honorable ones already ordered a performance of the unprecedented, new play, 'Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam'.

11. SŪTRADHĀRA Dear, it's good you've reminded me. For a moment, indeed, I forgot. For,

I am carried away by the haunting, passionate melody of your song,
As King Duṣyanta, here, by the swift running antelope. (5)

(*Both Exit*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

WHILE I BREATHE, I HOPE

"Review Essay"

Indian English Poetry Since 1950 : An Anthology edited by Vilas Sarang (Disha Books, Orient Longman Limited, 3-6-272, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029. 1990. 161 pages. Rs. 35).

A Spelling Guide to Woman by Charmayne D'Souza (Disha Books, Orient Longman Limited, 3-6-272, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029. vii + 64 pages. 1990. Rs. 25).

Looking Back by Sanjiv Bhatla (Disha Books, Orient Longman Limited, 3-6-272, Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029. x+42 pages. 1990. Rs. 25).

In Winter Once by Bibhas De (Writers Workshop, 162/92, Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700 045. 58 pages. 1990. Rs. 80).

Nirvana at Ten Rupees by Menka Shivadasani (XAL-PRAXI, 706A Poonam Apartments, Bombay 400 018. 48 pages. 1990. Rs. 25).

Women in Dutch Painting by Eunice de Souza (XAL-PRAXIS, 706A Poonam Apartments, Bombay 400 018. 45 pages. 1988. Rs. 35).

Borrowed Time by Manohar Shetty (XAL-PRAXIS, 706A, Poonam Apartments, Bombay 400 018. 56 pages. 1988. Rs. 35).

When we wish to draw closer to modern Indian poetry in English, there cannot be a better choice than these seven volumes. A random choice and yet they reflect almost accurately the strengths and weaknesses, the achievements and failures, the aspirations and despairs that mark poetry written by Indians in what was once an alien tongue. Evidently English is no more alien. The language accepted as "the gift of Goddess Saraswati" (in C. Rajagopalachariar's words) has now been elevated to the position of a goddess too. Numerous the worshippers at her shrine. Books of poetry, fiction, biography and history are literally flooding the market these days.

As far as poetry is concerned, there are hundreds of individual practitioners most of whom can be compartmentalised as discernible groups. The Calcutta group is led by P. Lal; the Bombay group is identifiably behind the pennant of Nissim Ezekiel; and the Madras group gets a lead from Krishna Srinivas. There is also the Pondicherry group which is silently adding a distinct voice to modern Indian poetry. The last mentioned is the one group that does not find representation in the present random choice. And yet, of all our modern Indian poets in English, these poets are the best in prosodic discipline.

However, prejudices die hard and the views expressed in Prof. P. Lal's introduction to the anthology of *Modern Indo-Anglian Poets* (1959) have continued to hold sway over anthologists. Prof. Lal had divided readers of poetry into the Aurobindonians who prefer mysticism and others who are at home with poetry that is not of the Spirit. This is quite an unnecessary division for, as Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, "one can enjoy both the poetry of the Spirit and the poetry of the earth, both sacred and secular poetry, both the epics of the soul and the lyrics of everyday life".

Though subsequently Prof. Lal changed his view and has now become a cautious admirer of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, his original view has percolated rather deeply into the consciousness of the Indo-Anglian anthologist. Thus, while none of the volumes here has a poet from the Aurobindonian fold, the anthology prepared by Vilas Sarang also has no Aurobindonian in it. In fact, it is mainly the Bombay group that finds a place here. Not that one should cavil at Sarang's predilection for the Bombay-Goa-Pune area, but the title of the anthology rather misleads us. After all, poets are active all over the sub-continent and a better geographical spread could have given a complete view of the state of contemporary Indian poetry in English.

Granted the limitation, one can heartily congratulate Sarang's helpful introduction to the chosen poets. Unlike the general run of such editors exhibiting their wares and justifying their choice, Sarang is refreshingly candid. For instance, Ezekiel is the poet who is often congratulated for his metrical discipline.

Sarang has other views. Seconding Christopher Wiseman, he feels that Ezekiel's iambic verse "suffers from monotony, mechanical rigidity and lack of foot-substitution".

Sarang further says in an aside that since Indians have not absorbed Western speech, they cannot write iambic metrical forms. "Indian English poets may perhaps try out quantitative or syllabic metres". Which is exactly what Sri Aurobindo did more than half a century ago when he wrote several poems in classical metres like hendecasyllabics and sapphics. Sri Aurobindo also wrote a long poem, *Ahana*, in rhymed quantitative hexameters. And he has left behind an unfinished epic *Ilion* (only 9 cantos out of the projected 12 are extant) in unrhymed quantitative hexameter where the speeches of heroes like Antenor and Priam and heroines like Penthesilea remind us of the noble accounts heard in Vyasa's Sanskrit epic.

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo wrote a detailed research note on quantitative metre in English and explained how it had failed because it is alien to the rhythm of the language which is primarily accentual. However, he felt that "the free creation of quantitative English verse in its own right, on its own basis, with its own natural laws, not necessarily identical with those laid down in ancient tongues" was still possible. In fact "an unconsciously quantitative free verse" was already present in the writings of Whitman, Eliot and other modern poets. Apparently Sarang has no idea of all these works in the Aurobindonian canon. All the same it is good to know that he is on the right track.

Vilas Sarang's introduction gives us other interesting perceptions as well. Dom Moraes's poetry "is unabashedly egocentric" and has "an autistic quality":

"Moraes remains a poet who does not fit into the general pattern of Indian English poetry. Nor can he be dismissed as a second-class citizen of the British literary world; his voice is too authentic, too individual, for that. His is a unique position, and a unique contribution to Indian English poetry".

Adil Jussawalla's "jagged, elliptical style" is a definite contribution to Indian poetry; Daruwalla's "poetry of incident and event" sometimes suffers from excess as when he commits an overkill with the exclamation mark. Like "the laxity of his poetics", Daruwalla's "stern objectivity" in refusing to mourn for the students and professors massacred at the Dacca University comes in for Sarang's criticism. A. K. Ramanujan and Kamala Das are also no sacred cows for Sarang. They receive insightful analysis and fulsome praise but their weaknesses are not passed over :

"Kamala Das' work is extremely uneven in quality, and many of her poems suffer from carelessness, cliches and naive sentimentality. As Ramanujan's poetry suffers from an excess of intellectual control, Das's poetry is harmed by a lack of intellectual moulding".

Sarang is more generous with the rest of the modern brigade which is as it should be. Of course, R. Parthasarathy is "awkward and false". But Sarang finds Manohar Shetty to be "the most promising of the new entrants to the field of Indian English poetry".

All this is good, but what about the basic problem of Indians writing poetry in English? Can this be done with success? Vilas Sarang addresses himself to this problem too. Apparently though an army of poets have been striving hard to find their identity in an alien language, Jayanta Mahapatra alone has come somewhere near success (and Jayanta is not of the Bombay group) :

"Mahapatra's poetry is a phenomenon of special significance, for it seems to point toward the direction that Indian poetry will take most fruitfully. Extremely local, it has, at the same time, an international quality. Escaping the orbit of Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas, it claims a wider kinship with such poets as Whitman, Neruda and other Latin Americans. The Orissa landscape—with Puri and Konarak looming large—has a strong presence in the poetry of Mahapatra; the funeral pyres burn unceasingly on the banks of Mahapatra's poetic world.

But, more than the physical surroundings, it is the deeper levels of Indianness that are crucial. The tone of quiet acceptance, with a latent awareness of centuries of suffering, perhaps indicates a very Indian sensibility".

With such a helpful introduction, it becomes a positive pleasure to read the poems in the anthology. Just as his introduction is unusual, Sarang's selection, too, avoids an excess of the familiar anthology pieces. However, the fascination for A. K. Ramanujan's 'Obituary', R. Parthasarathy's pathetic description of modern Tamil as "an unrecognisable carcass, quick with the fleas of Kodambakkam" and Kamala Das's 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' continues. One cannot hide a smile at the scriptural elevation accorded to these poems which at best have but a weary elegance and wait for a perceptive child to exclaim about the 'emperor's new clothes'.

Let them be. It is good to seek absorption in other meaningful creations as in the Haiku from Sarang himself:

> "Beside griffins carved in stone
> pigeons brood over
> their separate solitude."

Sarang has tried his best to choose carefully from his eighteen poets and by bringing out the best in the poets, he also brings out the best in the reader. An anthology that sternly avoids poems that display vulgar histrionics is always welcome even if it opens its portals to prosy verse as in the rather crude presentation of 'A Crude Definition of Family' by Darius Cooper:

> "Mother picks out lice
> from his hair.
> Father searches for a future
> on his face.
> Son presses two tiny sticks
> against his eyeballs.
> All three collapse
> into one laughter
> before separating
> for the day."

Coming to the poets in individual volumes, Charmayne D'Souza wins the toss. Theatrical pessimism of the kind exhibited by Charmayne is nothing new in Indo-Anglian poetry; but the raw vitality in her phrase-making does make us sit up. The angry young woman is evident everywhere, the pride and frustrations of being a woman in a man-directed world are self-evident here. There is a Sylvia Plathesque strain in poems like 'Go Away, Old Man', 'Judith' and 'A Salted Woman'. An obsession with death pervades Charmayne's imagery and comes off best in the section, 'Gamma'. The poem, 'No Sir, I do not wish to remain in the USA' is a good rein to vaulting ambition :

> "It was time we returned
> before we became invisible
> back then to our own
> Indian rope tricks
> which had held us snared
> all those years,
> yet promised us
> their own tortuous path
> to heaven."

Like Charmayne, Sanjiv Bhatla has also managed a pointed introduction from Nissim Ezekiel. Ezekiel rightly commends Sanjiv's ability to create "subtle characters' who turn out to be familiar figures in the ken of our private consciousness. The country friend, the ageing spinster and the widower in 'A widower's son' have the knack of getting ensconced in our memory.

As with other poets here, Bibhas De also keeps away from metre or rhythm. What makes his poems distinct is his scientific background that gives a special touch to his images. He would have us understand that not all scientific and technological advance has helped us shed our fear of the primeval night. The mystery of creation is too deep for us to penetrate successfully. Perhaps our ancients delved the mystery better with their instruments of mystic transcendence! The naked Jain monk, the Vedic insights: or, is it that this spiritual beginning has led to the present technological conclusion through the aeons?

"The cosmological arrow of time
Is the sense in which
The worlds expand; and then
There is in each entity
Of the earth or space,
Dead or animate,
A passion for declivity –
All order wants to be chaotic
Giving us the thermodynamic
Arrow of time; or sighingly
One hoaryheaded may say
Time is that which
Distinctly in my bones I feel –
The vector psychological."

Bibhas De's clustre of twelve poems titled 'Earth Update' (in which you find the passage quoted above) is a serious attempt to probe the mystery of life and death through the double-vision of a scientist and a poet.

It is a return to man-woman relationship and slick word-building in Menka Shivdasani's *Nirvana at Ten Rupees*. A slab of inventive gossip about how girls pass through adolescence and how we search for illumination everywhere (Bombay, Pondicherry, Paris, where you will), and how one has a constant joust with one's shadows. Bright verse, but where is poetry in all this verbal play?

Women in Dutch Painting reveals a fine image-carver at work. Realism in Eunice is relieved of its jagged edges by a genuine poetic approach. In the light of contemporary living which has lost the art of togetherness, her poetic imagination has to dispense with roses and rainbows. 'Home for the Aged, Sydney' is a typical Eunice creation :

"They came into the world stone cold,
faces furrowed with dark rain.
Nobody called them.
They have no history.

More chilling than fiction
the lives of those
so marked with sorrow.
The sun rises and sets,
rises and sets."

So to the last in the collections: Manohar Shetty. His is the most curious sheaf of poems because of the imagery. Not particularly distinguished as an able versifier, yet his ability 'to connect' witn meaningful side-glances cannot be ignored. There is something more than mere innocent twittering when we come across so many zoobiotic passages which involve us with dead ants in tea dregs, white mice in a sewage, centipedes gnawing in ears, pulped frogs, lame dogs, elephants, bats, the praying mantis. One whole poem on 'Domestic Creatures' too :

"Open the lid, he tumbles out
Like a family secret;
Scuttles back into darkness;
Reappears, feelers like
Miniature periscopes,
Questioning the air;
Leaves tell-tale traces:
Wings flaky as withered
Onion skin, fresh
Specks scurrying
In old crevices."

The few lines do provoke our imagination. How like cockroaches, the race of poets! The two races have endured from the dawn of civilization, and even in the age of powerful pesticides and the Idiot Box, neither the cockroaches nor our poets have given up their battle for survival. Certainly not when poets like Manohar Shetty know how to make nature yield to their caresses with their precise perceptions. Even that mini-crocodile, the common lizard, can be good material for the promising poet :

"Tense, wizened,
Wrinkled neck twisting,
She clears
The air of small
Aberrations
With a snapping tongue,
A long tongue."

After all, *dum spiro, spero*. While I breathe, I hope and when so many enthusiastic practitioners of verse are here, the exalted poet, the highest possible poet, *l'altissimo poeta*, cannot be far behind.

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER
CHANDRAKA B.

THE UNEASY TAPESTRY

Review Essay

Zones of Assault by Ranjit Hoskote, pp. 94; *My World* by Tabish Khair, pp. 72; *The Attic of Night* by Anna Sujatha Mathai, pp. 72; *The Serene Flame* by Makarand Paranjape, pp. 81; *Single Woman* by Tara Patel, pp. 63; *The Lunar Visitations* by Sudeep Sen, pp. 85. All are published by Rupa Paperback, Calcutta, 1991.

The six volumes of poetry brought out under the banner of "Rupa Paperback" constitute a sizeable poetic harvest of recent times; five of them are maiden collections. Beautifully printed (with an occasional printing error which could have been avoided with a little care) these books seem to share a common concern: a shared belief that poetry still matters in spite of our patriotic squabbles. Despite variations in tone as well as in quality, the poems display an anguished preoccupation with the personal voice. Obviously not all these poems can be given the same grade. These may constitute the transition from the established older generation to newer sprouts of a fresh season.

The 44 poems in *Zones of Assault* by Ranjit Hoskote, arranged under seven sub-groupings, present, in a strident voice full of youth and energy, the violence and complexity of the world around us. Aggressive in their use of heavy consonant structures, these poems often aim at near surrealistic images of nightmarish horror. A preoccupation with the subterranean or the subliminal occasionally reminds the reader of Dylan Thomas, though it does not lessen the originality of Hoskote's sharp vision nor the fierceness of his sledge-hammer blows. The complexity of the perceptions is well brought out by the half-metaphorical and half-realistic images employed in various poems. His fondness for harsh sounds, elliptical syntax and telescoping of images and ideas accounts for the special effects that are characteristic of his poetry—tautness, ambiguity, even violence.

Examples are profuse, but this one, casually chosen, is from "Bandra Creek: Night Crossing":

> Windrush ice cements my skeleton collar,
> Windrush ice in fine strands spun
> Out to the deep heart of the sun.
> My soles earthquake above miles and miles
> Of girders clanging on embered tracks
> A red-eyed hymn of war.
>
> (p.23)

Occasionally one comes across a poem like "Hardwar" or "Two Women in Midsummer", which is in a relaxed style and provides a refreshing constrast. It is not easy to visualize which of these two styles the poet is likely to pursue in the years to come—may be both.

Tabish Khair's *My World* is a collection of 32 poems which read more or less like one poem. There is apparently the same rhythm, even the same tone and a general sense of holding back something from the reader, perhaps from the writer himself. This is particularly emphasized in such opening lines as

> There is something in the night that speaks so much,
> But just so much and nothing more.
>
> ("In The Night", p.51)

and,

> There is something sad about second-hand books
> Their creased covers have seen a little too much
> Their yellow pages promise yet another story.
>
> ("Second-Hand Books", p.43)

The promised story is never told. The title poem of the volume gives away the secret of the poet's art:

> My world is so small
> That you don't see it by the side of your road
> As you drive to office, five days a week. (p.54)

> My world is small and its walls are weak
> For they are made of clay and clay to clay returns—
> Leaving no trace where it stood, no monument of defeat.
> (p.55)

Yet it is difficult to dismiss this volume as a monument of defeat, for while there is little freshness in these poems, coming as they do from a young man's pen (the jacket says that the poet is only 25) there is a lot a frankness. The reader often feels that the lines have been heard before, there are faint echoes—not always too faint—of earlier poetic strains such as those of T.S. Eliot. This *deja vu* feeling is engendered by the long flowing lines and, except in two or three poems, by well worn phrases and compound epithets. Part of the drabness comes from the things he talks about; familiar things are presented in familiar expression. The facility with language is not exploited sufficiently to explore the significance of the experience. There is a smoothness of expression which often slips into 'slickness'. If the poet can go beyond his nostalgic preoccupations, and obsession with "me" and "mine" he might achieve a break through. A touch of authenticity will be gained if the rhythms are not so assured and almost taken for granted.

Beginning with an invocation to Shiva and Shakti, "the first and greatest of lovers", the author of *The Serene Flame*, Makarand Paranjape, makes a special request to the potential readers of this sequence of personal love poetry to "Look benignly on a beginner's faltering Muse/which totters even as it commences", and hopes that the poetry may "please discerning audiences". In the Prologue/Introduction/Preface to the thirty-piece love sequence he establishes the tongue-in-check quality of the post modern love poet, afraid of sounding sentimental, willing to bring in a bit of latter-day sensuality and undercutting some of the romantic bouts of excessive passion. There is a scholar of post structualist preoccupations lurking somewhere behind the lover and the poet, welcome on account of his indiscreet interventions adding pepper and salt to the domestic celebration of a husband's well-earned love for his wife. Open any page at random and you can see this self-reflexive exuberance—reminiscent of Paranjape's critical enterprises. For instance, poem No. 9, "The

Bitter Half" (with a pun on "bitter") or poem No. 12, "Like Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi" which opens as follows :

> I read the love poems of others
> With quiet disgust–
> The unending obsession with sex,
> The sad broken lives,
> The innumerable trials
> To find understanding, perfection;
> It is like walking with bare feet
> On broken glass. (p. 36)

Occasionally reminiscent of the anti-romantic self-deflationary techniques of the love poems of W.H. Auden or Nissim Ezekiel, and yet authentically evoking the trials and traumas of domestic affection nearer home, willing to be tamed by the shrew yet struggling to hold his own, Paranjape has attempted the impossible task of celebrating love with a difference.

Let us now turn to another poet equally concerned with the nature and meaning of love:

> Love is a fragile flower,
> Though perennial as grass,
> Whose gift to me has always been pain.
> Dear love, I can't turn away....
> ("Mandala", *The Attic of Night*, p. 22)

Anna Sujatha Mathai's generalisations about love in *The Attic of Night* are quite a contrast to Paranjape's down to earth realizations of the experience of love steeped mostly in language of self-mockery. If beneath his facetiousness he hides a modicum of seriousness, Anna Sujatha Mathai is serious throughout. Somewhere within her poetic self, there is a remembered experience of pain which seems to run through most of the poems:

> Today...I am free to run
> through streets at night,
> and sing the moon my song of agony.
> But joy lives in another country.
> Besides, the great yearning is dead.
> Desire and opportunity rarely coincide.
> ("Experience", pp. 15-16)

There is a tendency to move away from the experience itself (which is often left vague and undefined) to generalised abstractions like the last line above. But in her better poems like "Ishvari's Voice" she is able to achieve a precision and concreteness, maybe because the experience is made sufficiently objective and the sadness of the maid-servant comes off untouched by mere sentiment. Most of the poems in this collection are marked by a tightlipped sombreness seldom relieved by any variation in tone or humour. Her family poems – incidentally this genre appears to be zestfully patronised by Indian English poets like Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Meena Alexander and even Parthasarathi— reveal an intense nostalgic longing and an ardent desire to belong.

To be a single woman creates problems for the person concerned; but how far should it concern the readers of her writings? For in *Single Woman*, a collection of 32 poems, Tara Patel seems to be obsessively preoccupied with the situation of an unmarried woman, the eldest of four daughters of an alcoholic and a devotee of Rama and Krishna. The autobiographical strain is perhaps pardonable. The woman who suffers and the mind which creates are so closely identified here that the theoretical tools of literary criticism are no longer relevant. What Tara Patel has to say is said without disguise or deception. Loneliness, or rather alone-ness, is the recurring theme in these poems written during the past 20 years. This Bombay poet seems to employ a style that is reminiscent of the Bombay period of Kamala Das. The general tenor of the poems may be seen in the opening lines of "Gul Mohurs":

> Blood-thirsty trees, devilish fire.
> I want to sacrifice myself on their altars
> Of glowing coals.
> A spectacular suicide, a virgin offering.
> Burn away my sexuality as incense,
> as sandalwood.
>
> (p.45)

The poems betray an intense feeling of deprivation in the poet's love-hate relationship with life itself. It would be difficult to underwrite her claim to be "an example of locked Indian womanhood".

The Lunar Visitations : A Cycle of Poems by Sudeep Sen, we are told on the jacket, "can be read as an epic". One has to have a rather strange idea of an epic to justify this claim. Perhaps it would be harsh to say unkind things about a first book of poems by a young writer whose works have appeared in prestigeous journals, and who is currently assistant editor of a New York journal. Among the six sections under which the poems in this volume are grouped, the most sensible ones, relatively speaking, are the nine pieces in Section I called "Prologue: Eclipse". The poem, "A Pilgrimage to Mathura", describes the writer's visit to Mathura, and gives a realistic, faithful account of what one might see there, especially if one goes there as a tourist, and not as a pilgrim. Perhaps one of the best poems is "Remembering Hiroshima Tonight" in which Sen reveals his flair for the exact word, the precise image and a controlled rhythm. It is a pity that the same cannot be said of several of the other poems in this volume. For instance "Durga Puja" appears to be a flat prosaic piece of description. The poetry fails to take off.

> These five days are exclusively hers,
> even her children –
> Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh, and Kartik –
> fade in her presence,
>
> while we spark and light, sing and dance,
> laugh and pray,
> untutored, uninhibited, unlike
> the rest of the year.
>
> (p. 35)

These lines tend towards journalistic description and there is more of literal statement than of suggestion or evocation of experience.

Taken together these six volumes give us an awareness of the continuing vitality of Indian English Poetry, a design of varied hues, a veritable tapestry of uneven excellence.

Ng. R. SINGH

THE WORLD OF TABISH KHAIR : GRACE UNDER STRAIN

My World by Tabish Khair. New Delhi, Rupa and Co., 1991. 72 pp.

Modern Indian poetry in English, despite its developing fraternity of the talented, has generally failed to command a faithful readership. The common belief held by critics is that our poets are needlessly influenced by British and American writers, particularly the Pound-Eliot tradition. Further, there is also the charge of an undue use of irony which can again be an imitation of British poets, as Jayanta Mahapatra points out. There seems to be some justification in this upbraiding, as irony without the compassion which should accompany it, or high-handed satire bereft of wit can be cloying in poetry. The older poets also seem to have been infatuated with the intellect, and repudiated "feeling" with a mechanical objectivity. Their poetry, therefore, mostly creates a depersonalizing and estranging effect. The reader cannot share such a poet's experiences, but is left outside the poet's insulated world.

Yet Tabish Khair's poems share experiences and feelings known to the reader. Adil Jussawalla calls him "an outstanding poet" for understandable reasons. Unlike the older generation of poets writing in English, there is no discernible influence of the Pound-Eliot "legacy" in his poetry. This is welcome. And although he does not write about "love", he composes poems imbued with true feeling.

Khair writes of a small town, of shared images, of common sights, by insistent excursions into felt experiences. The locale does not matter, because Khair is talking of basic human situations, recast through private experiences. In the process, he unfolds various layers of ordinary human affairs. As Jung says, the poet "forces the reader to greater clarity and depth of human insight by bringing fully into his consciousness what he ordinarily evades or overlooks or senses only with a feeling of dull discomfort". Tabish Khair, too, confronts us with unsettling emotions and compels us to see.

While other poets reveal a distrust of emotional subjectivity in any form, Khair sustains his poetic world with the urgent personal voice. In the very first poem, "Each Morning", for example, Khair relates his personal experience of waking up each morning without memories, but he remembers, is afraid, and tries to forget in spite of "the silence of broken dreams". As in another poem, "Reflections of Morning", the humdrum nature of existence is conveyed to us. But there is no fashionable *angst* as

> Schoolboys buying cigarettes, rickshaws, cars, men–
> The images of the morning reflected on my bleary-eyed
> consciousness
> By the mirror of turning time;
> Turning, revolving time reflecting once again
> Yesterday and the days before.

In another poem, "My Town", he speaks unromantically of brown bare hills near his house. There is irony in the poem as Khair depicts a representative Indian town stranded in time, already decaying before it could grow:

> There are some temples too, where the bells shriek
> sometimes;
> Temples standing immobile as custom, implacable as
> death
> In all its squashed-cockroachlike repulsiveness.
> This is all my town has to show for a thousand centuries.

But the irony is gentle and humane.

Furthermore, Khair reveals an awareness of history, and like any sensitive individual seems to be suffering from a sense of undefined guilt. He questions the past which is responsible for the present but displays no eagerness to transform history into myth, nor any undue obsession with roots. Yet, he is very sensitive to his surroundings, and without exhorting the reader to any cause, keeps reminding him of a disturbing reality where "all our reforms bred merely more corruption". He questions:

What do we pass on to the next generation, apart from
cars, houses, and litigation,
And the dust of our soil, and the death in our dust....
("To the Dead")

By identifying the "standardized enactments" of society, Khair also shows his refusal to live by them.

Some of the poems, however, are repetitive in subject and treatment. Others such as "House with the Grey Gate" have banal themes inspired by commonplace incidents:

In my street there is a white house with a little grey gate
That is slightly off one hinge and always open.
An old woman sits on its porch and knits,
Looking up when the gate creaks with age or wind,
Expecting someone; though no one comes, nor has come
for years.
An old man sometimes tidies up the faded garden
Where shrubbery has spread, refusing to be weeded out.

But notwithstanding the overt simplicity of the lines, Khair successfully conveys the paradoxical rhythms of life. It is the "old pattern of life" that Khair wants to rediscover:

There are mornings when all you want to do is stay in bed
And watch the lizards on the wall, the fan softly
sighing;
The sun seems so far away, it does not make sense
That something so remote should start–or end–your
day.
("Clocks")

Despite the emotional undercurrents in the poems Khair has no use for the "confessional" mode. There is only a pervasive atmosphere of the inevitable, the acceptance of things expected, with ironical resignation, and a quiet assertion of identity. Thus in "The Streets of my Poems" he says :

In all my poems I simply walk the streets of my town once again;
Unable to leave behind men and women pitching tar
On the hot roads, muscles straining in the sun;
Unable to forget that old beggar sleeping in the shade.

I would like to write of something other than dirt and death.
I would like to write of love sometimes, and mink-coat happiness.
I would like to write of flowers and the crunch of leaves underfoot,
Of laughter in the distance and the lonely lapping of the waves.

Another poem, "Second-hand Books", speaks of clues hidden in second-hand books. It may be a letter tucked inside, a receipt, or an unused ticket that seem to "hint at a world you cannot enter". The yellow pages promise yet another story which may remain as "elusive as the future".

"Calcutta" and "Remembering Tiananmen" are two among the best poems of this first volume. "Calcutta" begins with a stock-description of the old city, and Khair admits

I thought of all that has been said about this city of joy, city of sorrow;
The words, the clever, perceptive words uttered by Günter and Gandhi.

But there is no attempt at romanticization of poverty, and the reader is only reminded of men "smiling, retching, fighting" and also of the clever, educated men "who saw the death everyone sees, smelled the stink everyone smells". Then comes the unexpected turn in the final stanza:

And yet the rickshaw-wallah, who came here from Bihar
After a famine burnt his crops and landlord burnt his hut,
Has a song on his lips sometimes, and sometimes even a smile.
I am sure he expects Calcutta to live on for ever.

We can have no final understanding, as life reveals itself only in stages.

"Remembering Tiananmen" is an unadorned tribute to the "young men and women" who laid down their lives at Tianamen, China, during "days that had been dragon-ridden": "The young men and women who had loved too much/ And let their love bears leaves without the deeper root". The tinge of regret is unmistakable because with the death of the youth, dreams have also died young:

> All good things soon come to an end, our elders had said
> When we stood in Tiananmen Square making poems.

The identification of the poet with the "young men and women" is achieved in an unselfconscious manner. Further, the images of "the willow-breaking pavilion", "almond-blossoms", "snow", and "cherry-tree" effectively recreate the atmosphere of Tiananmen and China.

Khair is not a social poet with revolutionary ideals in mind. On the contrary, a mood of graceful acceptance pervades the poems. And while he is aware that there can be no simple solutions, he is also sceptical of new-fangled ideas and contemporary material culture. What Khair seems to say is that on the thoroughfare of life there can be no such thing as being modern or progressive. Khair unerringly explores ordinary experiences because life needs to be interpreted afresh for those who, in oblivion, let it pass by.

BRAHMANAND SINGH

A SLICE OF MOON

The Lunar Visitations by Sudeep Sen. New Delhi, Rupa and Co., 1991. 85 pp.

Sudeep Sen's poems are robust, candid, vulnerable, by turns tender and aggressive. Tightly packed stanzas of fantasy, surreal juxtapositions, mystery and myth with rapid scene changes—it takes time to recover from the dizzy stupor this collection puts you in. *The Lunar Visitations*, a cycle of poems, gazes into life both intense and listless, and is brilliantly subsumed into the source of its inspiration.

Sen's *Lunar Visitations* opens with the *Prologue: Eclipse*, where he sees

> ...the moon, sliced and
> obscured by clouds
> through the wrought iron grill

and the moon thereafter never leaves him. Moving through a "Pilgrimage to Mathura", a curious blend of Indian/Eliotic urban reality, he soon finds himself "Remembering Hiroshima Tonight", where the real flowers bloom 'in moonlight'.

In the "Valley of Gods", a poem written for Amitav Ghosh, Sen marches through 'Tamas' (death), 'Satwa' (reason) in which 'nothing seemed real/except the presence of/two human souls in the wind', to 'rajas' (passion), where shadow lines stake their claim even as reason belies 'rationality/death, life, and passion'. Interestingly again, the moonlight creates 'a silver swish/another rippled crescent, weaving a curious circle of reason'! Later again in section one, moonlight seizes the moment 'to pierce one of the roof cracks' in "The Man in the Hut".

> A Sharp band of light shot through,
> whitewashing the faint clay walls.
>
> In a trance, the man watched on.

The ray focussed itself
on the burst yolk.

Eclipsed, it looked like
disfigured moon
glistening tremulously.

The mythical light thus takes away 'the soul/after an aborted life'. Through a few more intense poems like "The Woman of a Thousand Fires", "One Moonlit December Night" and "In the Gallery", the book moves into its second section, *The Ceremony*.

The Ceremony observes events like the "Durga Puja" and "Karva Chauth" and highlights the magi-mythical and religious notions of the moon.

So much rested on the moon's presence
so much depended on its appearance.

And later

what if the moon did not come out?
would it mean their husband's deaths?

All these build up to a cosmic revelation :

The marriage of the moon with the sun
occurred long before
the first man ever appeared,
long before the first ceremony
had ever taken place.

The Lovers and the Moon, which forms the third section, focuses on love and lunacy. Whereas lovers can feel that 'a large myth was looming all around', to a lunatic

the asylum made him mad,
mad men made him delirous.

In "In the Asylum" and "Outside the Asylum", Sen voices the age old line between sanity and insanity ('sanity diffused in insanity/or the other way around/even they didn't know').

Section four, *A Child's Fable*, captures some poignant moments of one's childhood. When the fairy godmother asks him to make wishes, in "A Childhood Dream",

> I was just about to wish...
> the doorbell rang.
> It was the milkman.
>
> He'd left three bottles at the doorstep.
> I went to pick them up
> but couldn't comprehend
>
> how the moon had squeezed herself
> into a liquid form
> to three symmetrical shapes

Later, the moon 'hidden, fully or partially,/half, quarter, or the propitious full,/diffused, patched, edged or etched' becomes a 'bouncing rhythm of human experience'.

Section five, *Nightscape in a Moonlit City*, carries some extremely interesting titles like "Leaning against the Lamp-Post", "A Night Shot" and "Calcutta Vignettes". The city, where 'the day sees/trade, business brawls,/love, deceit—all for the sacrarium beneath' and where the evenings and nights

> witness to the whore's swaying breasts,
> murderers' dubious strangle,
> beggar's intestinal attrition....

offers a grim reality clamoured by silence.

With the *Epilogue: The Triads*, section six, the cycle comes to a close by experiencing fire, death, devastation. Sen sees the moon, cuts a slice of it and can clearly visualize his historic epic:

> I saw the moon sliced
> I saw it obscured by clouds,
> I saw it shimmering through the grilled frame.

All of this was a part of his lunar visitation.

Sen writes with a nonchalant flair which expects the reader to take his own bafflement on trust. He invites the reader's complicity like a wishbone, provoking a nimbus of shared experiences and desires, and shapes anecdotes and myths into emblems, with memorable results.

Personal detail about the human condition moves in and out of generalized statements and his verse is, by turns, poignant and provoking. Even when he is curiously evasive, sometimes, his poems are enticing, sensuous and charged with a kind of compulsive secrecy always just on the verge of revelation. There are shivering allusions, an anxious tenderness, moments of surrender, an occasional deceptive steadiness—and all of them full of the incidental delights of recognition.

CONTRIBUTORS

Meena Alexander, born and raised in India, now teaches English at Hunter College and Columbia University in New York City. Her published volumes of poetry include *House of a Thousand Doors* and *The Storm : A Poem in Five Parts* (a portion of which appeared as the lead poem in *Kavya Bharati 1*). In addition to two critical studies of Romanticism, she has most recently published a novel, *Nampally Road*.

John Alter teaches at the Woodlands Mountain Institute, which has campuses both in Nepal and in Franklin, West Virginia, U.S.A. Born and educated in India, he has taught several years each in Punjab and in Uttar Pradesh.

Anamika is a poet and translator who teaches English in the University of Delhi.

David C. Buck teaches at Bardstown, Kentucky, in the United States. His extensive experience in translating Tamil poetry has grown out of an earlier residence at Madurai.

Jatin Das is a painter who also writes poetry. He has given more than forty showings of his paintings in India and in Europe, and his poetry has been published in a dozen journals in India and abroad. A native of Orissa, he now resides in New Delhi.

Kamala Das, one of India's best known poets, lives and writes in Kerala. An extensive selection from five volumes of her poetry has been published by the CRNLE institute in Adelaide, Australia. Her fiction writing is most recently represented in the collection *Padmavati the Harlot and other Stories*.

Bibhas De currently resides at La Habra, California, in the United States, where he works as a research scientist. His first published collection of poetry was *On Grunion Shore*. His second volume, *In Winter Once*, is reviewed in this issue of *Kavya Bharati*.

Nissim Ezekiel, as introduced in an earlier issue of *Kavya Bharati*, is Nissim Ezekiel. He is Editor of *The Indian P.E.N.*, and on the editorial boards of several other poetry journals. The publication of his *Collected Poems 1952-1988* has been one of the most celebrated events in recent Indian literary history.

S. A. Hamid is Reader and Head in the Department of English of the Kumaun University Campus at Almora in Uttar Pradesh.

Prem Kumar lives at Ifsaquah in the Seattle area of Washington State, U.S.A. A native of Punjab, he has published a volume of Punjabi poetry and has made Punjabi translations of a volume of Russian verse.

Sukrita Paul Kumar teaches in Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi, and is a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. Her most recent publications, *The New Story* and *Conversations on Modernism*, have been focused on Hindi and Urdu short fiction.

Michael Lockwood (Department of Philosophy) and *A. Vishnu Bhat* (Department of English) are faculty members of Madras Christian College. They have edited and translated into English the two oldest extant farces in Indian Literarture, *Bhagavad-Ajjuka* and *Mattavilāsa*, both written in the seventh century A.D. Their essay "Metatheatre and Sanskrit Drama" is forthcoming.

Jayanta Mahapatra, founding Editor of *Kavya Bharati*, has published more than a dozen volumes of widely appreciated poetry, the most recent of which is a long poem, *Temple*. His next volume, *A Whiteness of Bone*, is forthcoming later this year.

Darshan Singh Maini, who now resides in Chandigarh, was for many years Professor and Head of the Department of English at Punjabi University, Patiala. His extensive publications, which are most focused on American literature, also include *Studies in Punjabi Poetry* and a volume of his own verse, *A Reluctant Flame*.

O. T. J. Menon has published his translations of Malayalam poetry in many of the leading journals of India. He currently resides in Bombay.

Hoshang Merchant teaches in the Department of English of the Central University at Hyderabad. He has published two volumes of poetry, most recently *Yusuf in Memphis*, as well as *In-Discretions*, a study of the life and work of Anais Nin. A third volume of poetry, *Flower to Flame*, is in press.

Prema Nandakumar is one of our most helpful critics of Indian Literature. Her *Sri Aurobindo, A Critical Introduction* represents a major interest of her work, and she has contributed bibliographical and critical articles to many important scholarly publications. Her novel *Atom and the Serpent* shows still another facet of her work.

Rana Nayar, who is a Lecturer in the Faculty of English at Punjab University, Chandigarh, has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the dramas of Edward Albee.

R. Nedumaran is a Professor in the Postgraduate Department of English at American College, Madurai. He currently conducts a Translation Workshop, investigating problems in the theory and practice of this discipline.

K. Ayyappa Paniker and *Kumari Chandrika B.* are Chief Editor and Associate Editor respectively of the Medieval Indian Literature project sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi. Dr. Paniker has written several volumes of Malayalam poetry and translated much of it into English. Earlier he was Professor and Head of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Kerala.

Makarand Paranjape, Reader in the Department of English at the Central University, Hyderabad, has contributed poetry and reviews to many journals. His own first volume of poetry, *The Serene Flame*, is reviewed in this issue of *Kavya Bharati* and a second volume, *Playing the Dark God*, has more recently appeared.

Bhupinder Parihar teaches English at Government College, Ludhiana, Punjab. He has published a volume of his Urdu poetry, as well as translating other Urdu verse into English.

John Oliver Perry, recently retired as Professor of English at Tufts University, resides in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., from which he contributes many essays and reviews to journals related to Indian Poetry in English. His book-length study of issues in Contemporary Criticism of Indian Poetry in English is awaiting publication.

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.

Divik Ramesh is Lecturer in the Motilal Nehru College of the University of Delhi. His published works include *Feather*, a volume of poems translated into English, as well as two volumes of Hindi poems and another book of Hindi verse translated into Marathi.

T. Ravichandran is Lecturer in English in the College of the Vignan Educational Institutions at Vadlamudi in Andhra Pradesh. He currently is also at work on a doctoral dissertation on the fiction of Thomas Pynchon and John Barth.

E. M. Schorb lives in Mooresville, North Carolina, in the United States. He has published two volumes of Poetry, *50 Poems* and *The Poor Boy and Other Poems*, and his verse has appeared in several British and American anthologies.

Brahmanand Singh is a freelance writer specialising in literary reviews. He has published one volume of his poetry, *Rooted in Silence*, and has published other poems and short stories in journals both in India and overseas.

Ng. R. Singh teaches literature at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He has published a volume of poetry, *Words and the Silence*, and has contributed other poems to several different Indian journals.

James Swain lives in Cedarville, Illinois, in the United States, but writes on the basis of visits and long years of residence in North India and Nepal.

BOOKS RECEIVED

The following books of Indian poetry in English have been received in the Study Centre since the publication of the last issue of *Kavya Bharati*. Mention of a title in this list neither excludes nor guarantees the possibility of its being reviewed in a future issue.

Chadha, Inderpreet Singh. *Roundabout*. Amritsar: S. Harjeet Singh Chadha, 1990.

Daruwalla, Keki N. *Under Orion*. 2nd ed. New Delhi : Indus-Harper Collins, 1991.

— *Winter Poems*, 2nd ed. New Delhi: Indus-Harper Collins, 1991.

David, Joel V. *The Bowl of Silence*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1991.

Faiz, Faiz Ahmed. *The Rebel's Silhouette*, trans. Agha Shahib Ali. Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1992.

Gujral, Shiela. *Signature of Silence*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1991.

Kushal, Kulbhushan. *Shrinking Horizons*. Batala: Nirman Publications, 1990.

Mahapatra, Jeyanta. *Temple*. Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989.

Mahapatra, Sitakant. *Death of Krishna and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1992.

Misra, Adarsh. *Barricades*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1991.

Paranjape, Makarand. *Playing the Dark God*. Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1992.

Patel, Gieve. *Mirrored, Mirroring*. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Peeradina, Saleem. *Group Portrait*. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Pillai, Nirmala. *After the Silence*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1991.

Rao, Rama R. *Trishanku: Neither Here nor There*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1988.

Rashed, N. M. *The Dissident Voice*, trans. M. A. R. Habib. Madras : Oxford University Press, 1991.

Roychoudhury, Malay. *The Voice of the "Hungry Generation": Selected Poems*. Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1989.

Seth, Vikram. *Beastly Tales From Here and There*. New Delhi: Viking-Penguin Books, 1992.

Singh, Brahmanand. *Rooted in Silence*. Calcutta: Peacock Publications, 1990.

Sinha, A. A. *Reflections*. Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1989.

Thayil, Jeet and Vijay Nambisan. *Gemini*. New Delhi : Viking-Penguin Books, 1992.

SCILET

Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation

American College
Madurai

The Study Centre holds

Texts and criticism relating to seventy major Indian writers

Texts alone of a hundred other Indian writers

Current subscriptions to eighty literary journals, half of them relating directly to Indian writing

Most back issues of most of the above journals

Basic reference works for Indian literature

The Centre will, upon inquiry,

Furnish check lists of its holdings in any research area related to Indian literature

Provide at cost, where regulations permit, photocopies of material requested from these checklists

Attempt to acquire other material, as requested, related to interests that researchers may specify

Welcome any appropriately identified researcher to use its library in person

Please direct inquiries to the following address

Paul L. Love
American College
Madurai 625 002

Statement about ownership and other particulars about

KAVYA BHARATI

FORM IV (See Rule 8)

Place of Publication	American College Madurai 625 002
Periodicity of its Publication	Twice Yearly
Printer's Name Nationality Address	T. J. George Indian Lokavani-Hallmark Press (P) Ltd. 62/63, Greams Road, Madras 600 006
Publisher's Name Nationality Address	R. P. Nair Indian SCILET C/o PG Department of English American College, Madurai 625 002
Editor's Name Nationality Address	R. P.Nair Indian SCILET C/o PG Department of English American College, Madurai 625 002
Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners and share holders holding more than one percent of the total capital	Study Centre for Indian Literature in English and Translation American College Madurai 625 002

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

(Signed) R. P. Nair
Publisher