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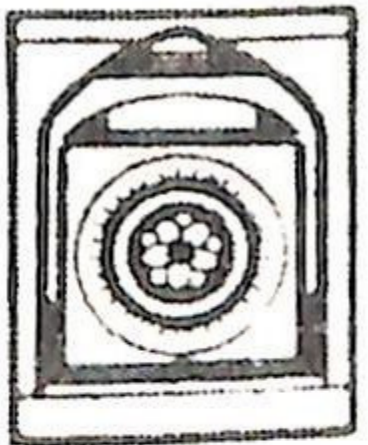
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Guest Editor

Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee



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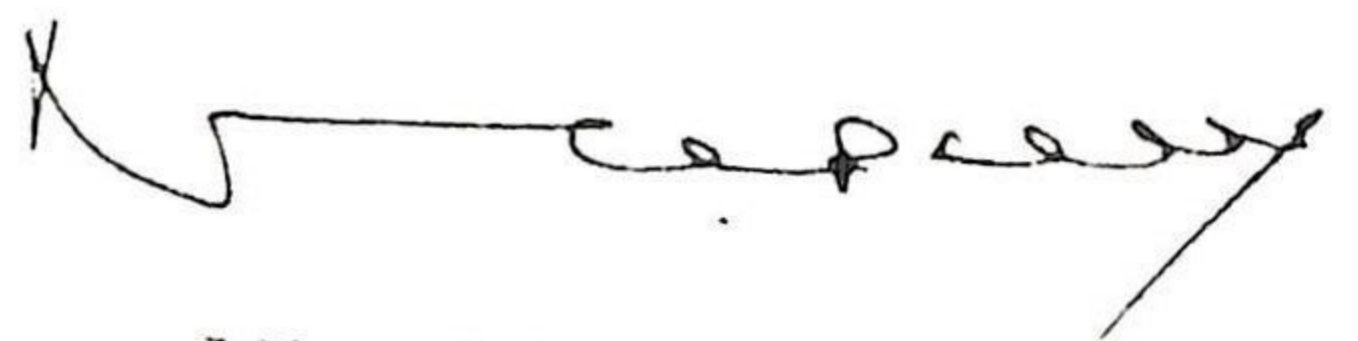
From the Editor's Desk

Granthana has fallen behind schedule by almost three quarters. While this is no excuse, but there was a nearly insurmountable stumbling block. It was decided by the Foundation that this issue would be devoted to reviews of regional language books. A laudable decision, especially in view of the fact that maximum exposure on a national level is usually enjoyed by English language books, where regional language ones are treated like their poor country cousin. Accordingly, the present Editor and the Director of the Foundation worked in tandem and letters were sent from the Foundation assigning review works to books in 22 languages. The choice of the best book recently published in a particular language was left with the reviewers, as the present editor does not even begin to claim that his knowledge of the publishing scenario in all Indian languages is uniformly in-depth. Barring the exception of two or three reviewers who regretted for various reasons (and whom we promptly substituted), others accepted the assignments, but even after constant and consistent follow-up during the last seven months, we managed to obtain review articles only in nine languages so far: Asamiya, Hindi, Konkani, Punjabi, Urdu, Oriya, Maithili, Malayalam and Tamil. In our desire for perfection, we strove to bring out a comprehensive issue with a total over-view of regional languages scenario. Alas! our deadline thus kept shifting time and again. Being exasperated, we finally decided to divide the reviews in two issues so that the readers as well as the scholars who responded early are not kept waiting inordinately. Here is the fragmented issue, then!

Mahabaleswar Sail hails from the rural areas of North Canara bordering Goa and Karnataka. He writes in Konkani. His novel *Kali Ganga* is believed to be a landmark in Konkani fiction. Damodar Mauzo, who reviews this novel, believes that "At a time when Konkani activists are seen working hard to strengthen the bonds between the people of different regions and to hold Konkani speakers in Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala together, this excellent work of

fiction has brought the people emotionally closer.” M. Asaduddin hails the first-ever publication of the complete works of Munshi Premchand in Urdu in 24 volumes by the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language. Lamenting the fact that even after seven decades of the great master’s death we do not have definitive editions of Premchand’s works, he takes up and discusses some textual problems, especially variations in Urdu and Hindi versions of the same text. Anamika’s review of Kedarnath Singh’s new offering *Tolstoy aur Cycle* is a highly creative piece. According to her, “This anthology does give us useful insights into the art of living and surviving against all odds, surviving one piece into this merde-merde world of public and private breakdowns”

Apart from the reviews we publish in this issue three more articles—Raja Rammohun Roy Memoiral Lecture of 2005 by Mrinal Miri, an argument on ‘Premchand’s Relevance Today’ by Manohar Bandyopadhyay on the occasion of Premchand’s 125th birth anniversary, and an introductory piece on Fakirmohan Senapati by J.P. Das written on the occasion of Fakrimohan Senapati’s 150th birth anniversary. Mrinal Miri, one of our finest philosophers of the modern times, deliberates on ‘The Spiritual and the Moral’. Steeped in erudition as well as perception, the essay argues that if we accept the epistemic notion of spirituality that it is the knowledge of one’s self, it follows that self is not transparently, self-evidently, available to us. He goes on to analyse the corollary notion that the engagement with the physical world is the main stumbling block to achieving authentic self-knowledge. Through a sequence of engaging arguments in logical exposition, and not logic chopping, the author takes us through the high Hindu Brahmanical tradition of spiritual life which demands complete ‘detachment’ from the *samsara*; the traditional Christian conception of the spiritual life which involves time spent in contemplative prayer, guided or solitary retreats, and sometimes the painful wrestlings with God so beautifully portrayed by the Metaphysical Poets; Gandhi’s sense of spirituality which concerns the truth of the moral life and the belief that there is an interior route to moral truths just as there is an exterior route to the truths of the natural sciences; tribal notion of spirituality which is seamlessly continuous between the inanimate, the animate and the human. The readers will find the article enormously stimulating and edifying.



Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee

The Spiritual and the Moral

Mrinal Miri

There are several “received” views about spirituality. One of them is that spirituality is primarily an epistemic notion — that it is concerned with knowledge of oneself, or, quite simply, knowledge of the self, and that achieving such knowledge requires efforts of very special kinds. Another received view of spirituality is that it has to do with knowledge and techniques of dealing with the presence of “spirits” in the material world - “spirits” which intervene in our day to day life with erratic regularity and unpredictability. “Phenomena” such as these and others, e.g., telepathy, a person’s capacity to tell accurately, or even relatively accurately, what is happening somewhere at a great distance from where she is located and similar others used to be the subject of both conceptual and empirical enquiry of the discipline named, “Extrasensory Perception” (ESP), fairly popular in the west in the early part of twentieth century. Techniques were also developed to “communicate” with “spirits” of dead persons, which, although devoid of physical bodies, were thought to be somehow entrapped in the physical world - a subject which also featured in fictional writings of various kinds. In this lecture, I shall not be concerned with this second view of spirituality, although, perhaps it still has an interesting presence in some of our religious thoughts and practices.

I should, however, say right at the beginning, that the second view of spirituality must be distinguished from the view, which is prevalent among many tribes of India - and elsewhere - that the entire world of nature and even artifacts are permeated by an intangible “force” (for want of a better word) with which it is possible to communicate - or be at least in “touch”. I shall have something to say about spirituality of this kind. The most important thing about this view, to my mind, is that it is based, unlike some other revered traditional

views, on an emphatic acceptance of the reality of the day to day mundane material world.

2.

The view that self-knowledge requires efforts of a special kind, that it is a matter of achievement, implies that the self is not transparently, self-evidently, available to us. Within many religious traditions, the assumption is that the original, unknown or epistemically beclouded self is *given* and stands apart from the physical world with which we human beings are willy-nilly engaged. It is, however, precisely this engagement with the physical world that is the stumbling block to achieving authentic self-knowledge. There are many traditionally prescribed practices aimed at removing this stumbling block: some kinds of meditations, yogic exercises, the idea of a spiritual retreat away from the entanglements of everyday life, performance of various kinds and degrees of austerities and so on.

In her excellent paper, "Love and Attention"¹, Janet Martin Soskice puts the view of one of the traditional Christian conceptions of "the spiritual life" that still enjoys great respectability and reverence as follows: "For each of us, no doubt, a vision is conjured up by the phrase, 'spiritual life' and for most... in our personal lives at least this is an eschatological vision - something piously hoped for in the future, but far from our daily lives where, spiritually, we just 'bump along' ... in its Catholic Christian form it might involve long periods of quiet, focussed reflections, dark churches and dignified liturgies. In its higher reaches it involves time spent in contemplative prayer, guided or solitary retreats, and sometimes the painful wrestlings with God so beautifully portrayed by the Metaphysical Poets. Above all it involves solitude and collectedness. It does not involve looking after small children." Or take the great sufi tradition. True self-knowledge which is also necessarily knowledge of God, involves deliberate "uprooting" of what we call sensory knowledge and complete rejection of knowledge based on argumentation, scholarship and study. In the sufi tradition this is called *fana* — annihilation. And it is *fana* that finally leads to *baqua* - permanence in God. The role of music in the movement from *fana* to *baqua* is absolutely crucial (at least in the Chisti tradition). A verse extolling the two is introduced by a *qumwal* (musical performer), then it is highlighted by a prominent master or senior devotee, then it becomes the focus of constant repetition to the point of transforming

both consciousness and physical existence, and then in some cases the result is a shift from ritual engagement to mortal disengagement. The verse, the music, the mood render the listener/devotee blank to any mood save that of the calling, and the call, once heeded, leads to death. To outsiders, it appears as suicide, but to insiders it is surrender to love. The death of the second major Chisti master, Shaykh Qutb ad-din Bakhtiyar Kaki is attributed to such a verse and music. (See Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, pp 16-17). Within the high Hindu Brahmanical tradition too the spiritual life is frequently seen as demanding complete “detachment” from the life of the world - *samsara* - and being firmly established in this detached consciousness — *sthitaprajna*. Sometimes, the original, detached self, which the life of spirituality endeavours to “recover”, is also called the “witness” consciousness or self - the self as the disengaged witness to samsaric life. One difficulty with such views of the original self and self-knowledge is that if life begins with complete ignorance of this self, then how do we know that the spiritual practices that we devise will lead to its knowledge? Must the story rather not be something like the following: we begin with self-knowledge; somewhere, along the way, we lose it or almost lose it, and then devise ways of recovering it? That is why frequently, within such traditions of spirituality, the language of “forgetfulness” and “remembering” has a central significance. There is, therefore, self-knowledge before spirituality; but how do we know that the self-knowledge that the spiritual life generates is the same as the self-knowledge that such a life is directed at achieving? The idea of “forgetfulness” does not help, because even if we allow that we did forget how do we now know that we remember correctly?

This may sound like logic chopping, and in a way it is. But a more serious difficulty for me with this view of spirituality is that the disengaged self must also be disengaged from the life of morality, because the arena of the moral life is the mundane world of samsaric human relationships. The original self is as disengaged from the life of the virtues and vices as it is from all other aspects of the ordinary world of sense perception, of desires and emotions. My present self is shaped by the contingencies of my engagement with the world around me — my specific location in it, the language that I learn to wield which I cannot do except in and through relationships with the other, my memories and the human practices in which I willy-nilly get caught up, e.g. the games that I play, the books that I read, the conversations I have, the life within and outside my family, my professional commit-

ments, my friendships and so on. It is in this arena of the contingencies that the so-called virtues and vices - qualities of character such as — honesty, courage, justice, love, generosity, jealousy, greed, cowardice, deceitfulness etc. - come necessarily into play; these qualities of character are the very stuff of the moral life - without them the moral/immoral distinction disappears; and therefore morality itself disappears.

Self-knowledge is crucial to the life of morality. Is my honesty genuine? Is my courage not really a cover for my deep-seated cowardice? Is my generosity not really self-seeking by other means? To seek and find authentic answers to questions such as these is an integral part of the life of morality. Self-deceit and self-ignorance are, as it were, constituent hurdles to the life of the virtues, and the ego is their impeccable ally - the “big fat ego”, as someone calls it. The overcoming of the ego is a necessary step in the battle against the “cunning” of self-deceit. The spiritual “discovery” of the self can be given an intelligible, significant content at all only if it is seen as the overcoming of the ego that leads to a knowledge of the true springs of our actions, of our historically and contingently constituted being. Overcoming of the ego also must mean moral transformation, and it is my contention that moral transformation and spiritual self-discovery are of a piece.

3.

One way of showing this may begin with the realization that the reality which we human beings — or indeed all living beings inhabit — is a reality that is necessarily laden with value. Reality must be something that either *ought* to be or *ought not* to be - it is, therefore, seen as something that must remain as it is, or something that must be changed. In the case of animals and plants this aspect of reality is manifest in what has been called their ‘instinct’ for adaptation. In the case of human beings, it becomes evident through our sense of obligation. Devoid of the sense of obligation, one might indeed still be aware of a world, but it will be a world in which there will be no such thing as human *agency*. Human freedom is inalienably connected with the idea of human agency. If it is no longer possible for one to *act* in the sense in which human beings act, then there is no freedom either. If - to put it in the language of modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy — the “is” is no longer permeated by the “ought” - then human reality will no more be *human* reality.

Given that the sense of obligation is embedded in us, the important question for us is: what is special about *moral obligation*? Or, why should one be moral? The question arises against the background of the fact that one of the most profound predicaments of human life is the difficulty of cultivating the moral motive. The difficulty springs from the fact that to be established in the moral form of life requires what Kierkegaard calls the “transformation of our whole subjectivity”. To be morally motivated is not just to do the right thing in a given situation, but to be settled in a state of mind such that the right conduct simply flows from it. One of Wittgenstein’s aphorisms in *Culture and Value* runs as follows: “No one can speak the truth, if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot speak* it — not because he is not clever enough yet. The truth can be spoken only by someone who is clearly *at home* in it.” One can achieve such a settled state of mind or a state of being at home only by undertaking an arduous internal journey into the “springs of action, to root attitudes, thence to their expression in conduct”². Such a journey frequently involves the dismantling of whole forms of life before a settled state of moral “purity” is achieved. This is primarily an epistemic journey - a journey of self-discovery overcoming self-deception, self-knowledge overcoming self-ignorance. The assumption is that the possibility of the moral motive is conditional upon the possibility of achieving lucidity, utter clarity about oneself. It is sometimes suggested that the latter achievement is really at the hands of Providence. I shall leave this suggestion aside, and, instead say something about the suggestion that self-discovery is a matter of self-education.

The aim of moral self-education is to overcome the powerful impulses towards self-deception and self-ignorance, which tend always to entrench *us* in forms of life which are devoid of the moral motive. These impulses are powerful because they emanate from the ego. The first step towards overcoming the ego is to develop a form of attention, a concentration of epistemic energy, which will enable us to counter the benighting force of the ego, and, as it were, afford a glimpse beyond the ego into the self. An example of such a form of attention is perhaps aesthetic perception. Kant said about aesthetic perception that it quickens our cognitive faculties, and induces much thought. In other words, in aesthetic perception, as Mcghee has pointed out, “there is a receptivity in which ordinary perceptual experience becomes *perceptiveness* - a perceptiveness which reveals to us, through the concrete object of perception a general truth about reality...thus we may see in the fading of a flower impermanence-in-itself, and in the moment of seeing

discover an attitude to it.”³ Kant also said that an aesthetic judgment - judgment of taste - is grounded in a delight in the object that does not owe its origin to any representation of some prior interest that we judge the object to further. Many eyebrows may be raised by the invocation of Kant here. But all that needs to be admitted is the *possibility* of such receptivity and such disinterested delight. When Swaminathan, the powerful Indian painter says, “I paint because I cannot keep away from it, and it takes me away from myself” he affirms, at least in part, the possibility for himself. In the case of moral perception the receptivity and attention produces insights into moral truths: “true *ahimsa* (love) drives out all fear”, “the power of *ahimsa* is incomparably superior to that of violence”, “true humility is the other side of true dignity”. An important aspect of such insight, such quickening of awareness, is that it bears upon one’s experience of the world and thence on one’s conduct, so that one acts differently from how one would have done otherwise.

To my mind, spirituality is another name for the kind of attentiveness or sensibility that I have talked about and the concentration and gathering of energy that is associated with it. I would also like to think that at least part of the aim of spiritual practices, e.g. meditation is to achieve the stability of such attentiveness. I take here the example of Gandhi, and consider very briefly, the curious notion of “experiments with truth”.

The truth that Gandhi was concerned with was the truth (the real as opposed to the illusory) of the moral life. He believed that there is an “interior route” to moral truths just as there is an exterior route to the truths of the natural sciences. His experiments consisted in traversing this interior route until the possibility of the moral life is established. They were, as it were, purificatory exercises, which took him to the roots of the matter to what I have called “springs of action” resulting in “transformation of subjectivity”, and subsequent pulling down of a form of life and founding another. Gandhi’s fasts were an instrument of this experimentation; and there were several occasions in his life - in the early years, while in London, in South Africa and back in India — when dismantling of a form of life and establishing another took place. The journey is far from easy. As Gandhi puts it: “it may entail continuous suffering and the cultivating of endless patience. Thus step by step we learn to make friends with all the world: we realize the greatness of God or Truth. Our peace of mind increases in spite of suffering, we become braver and more enterprising... our pride melts

away, and we become humble... the evil within us diminish[es] from day to day.”⁴

The use of the word “experiment” is also suggestive of the fact that the moral quest - the traversing of the interior route - is not just a psychological journey, but an epistemic one — a journey which yields at once self-knowledge, and a knowledge of moral truths, such as the ones I mentioned a little earlier on. To achieve such self-knowledge, such quickening of awareness, is also to attain true freedom, *swaraj* - a state where one’s actions flow with utter spontaneity from one’s knowledge. Freedom is not the capacity to choose at random between alternative courses of action, but to act from an integral moral-epistemic stance.

For Gandhi, as for many others, the religious vision is inseparable from spiritual experience and the authenticity of the latter is guaranteed by the moral transformation that ensues. Morality, religion and mysticism are of a piece. The crucial difference between the Gandhian vision of spiritual life and some of what I have called the “received” versions of such a life is that for Gandhi, an active, total (that is, with one’s entire being) engagement with ordinary life - being ‘fully there’, imaginatively present to that which concerns us—can be informed by the most profound spirituality; spiritual pursuit does not require disengagement from samsaric life. To be spiritual and to be moral is to respond with utter *ahimsa* to what requires our response: “My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.”⁵ “I do *not* believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life.”⁶

Working on the spinning wheel, looking after an injured calf, being engaged in *satyagraha* for a particular end, keeping one’s own home clean and tidy—each one of these activities can be touched by a joyous spirituality, a sense of being in touch with the real order of things.

4.

It would be interesting to compare the account of spirituality as knowledge of the self that is rooted in historical contingencies with the modern - rather post-modern - discourse of the politics and knowledge

of *identity*: the anti-colonial nationalist discourse of Indian identity, the black movement, feminism, ethnicity, subalternity, the dalit movement in India and many others. Self-knowledge is the central concern of these discourses and the aim of such self-knowledge, as in the case of spirituality, is freedom. But one crucial difference between the idea of freedom that is part of the concept of spirituality and the notion of freedom that is embedded in the various discourses of identity is that while the latter is also seen as freedom from deception, here the deception has not so much to do with the self-aggrandizing strategies of the ego as with the relationships of power between the dominating other and the dominated self. These discourses are, therefore, necessarily also political discourses.

But, of course, the two discourses are importantly connected. Take, for example, the discourse of feminism. The politics of self-knowledge here can lead, and frequently has led, to a deepening perceptiveness and sensibility within an area of moral darkness created and sustained for centuries by the visible and invisible strategies of the "will to power". And it is in such unsuspected corners of darkness that the ego thrives and exercises its powers of self-deception. A community's will to power provides a fertile ground for the cunning of the ego to devise its own schemes of self-deception. In the domain of politics the feminist discourse, with all its internal differences and occasionally serious self-questionings, has been a formidable weapon in the "game" of power; in the moral domain, it can be a source of spiritual renewal of the kind that I have talked about. And, of course, for someone like Gandhi, politics *is* the proper arena of moral agency.

5.

Connected with the politics of self-knowledge that I have just talked about is the question of diversity of cultures and civilizations in the world and the possibility or otherwise of intercultural understanding and knowledge. One way of making clear the idea of modernity is to see it as centrally motivated by the idea epistemological unity as embodied in the natural sciences. If cultural diversity is a fact of life, then modernity's definition of culture must desist from any reference to the unitary idea of knowledge and truth. Universal, overarching epistemology must be seen as overriding cultural diversity. Take the following typically modern "definition" of culture: "a culture is a way of life of a people, including their attitudes, beliefs, values, arts, science, modes

of perception and habits of thought and activity.”⁷ Armed with this definition, we might think nothing of going forth into the world individuating cultures and distinguishing them one from another. But it is not quite that easy. Each of the identifying marks mentioned above is a potential source of problems. Apart from any specific problems that we might have in determining an entire people’s [and — what for that matter is a *people*] attitudes etc., there is one general problem that I would like to mention. This is as follows: If concepts such as “attitudes”, “values”, “arts”, “science” etc are to be cross-culturally available - which they must if they are to perform the function envisaged for them by the definition - then, they must be independent of any particular culture i.e. they must be capable of being wielded and understood independently of reference to any particular culture. This, of course, immediately brings up the question of a core — a decisive core—of human consciousness which must be culturally uncontaminated and which must be available in a culture transcending pristine form. And this question has not only been answered affirmatively in modern West, but this answer and its ramifications are, as it were, the defining character of western modernity. A major part of the West’s intellectual energy has been devoted to an ever more complex articulation of this culture-free pristine core of human consciousness - the core whose substance is universal, unitary epistemology. It is also informed by the conviction that only the clearest possible grasp of this core can afford the correct vision of the multiplicity of cultures in the world. This is the vision of Thomas Nagel’s famous “view-from-nowhere” man. Armed with the resolute grasp of the all important core of human consciousness the viewer “from nowhere” stands outside the world of cultures, or culture-worlds and judges the worth and place of such worlds from its uncontaminated view point. There is, of course, great poignancy in this, but such is the fate of western modernity that having cast itself in the role of supreme judge, it must inevitably deprive itself of the solace of belonging to *a* world. But the rewards of this sacrifice are enormous. The no-where man not only knows the truth about himself; he knows the truth, or at least is in a position to know - the truth about all others; he also knows the true meaning of “right” and “wrong”, of “moral” and “immoral”; he, therefore, occupies the unique vantage point from where he can tell the illusory from the real; the better from the worse; the more developed from the less; the beautiful from the ugly; and, in principle, can find the just place for each culture of the world in the community of cultures. No wonder, therefore, the idea of the no-where-man is a

compelling idea. Ironical as it may sound, it replaces in western modernity, the traditional idea of God or the received idea of the original, disengaged self that we talked about at the beginning of this paper. It is also a very close cousin of the idea of Cosmic Exile introduced (though not subscribed to) by WV Quine. The Cosmic Exile, like the no-where-man, does not belong to any world; he stands outside all worlds. But how does one attain such a position? I find Ernest Gellner's answer to this question the best: "A most favoured recipe for attaining this is the following: clear your mind of all conceptions, or rather perceptions, which your education, culture, background, what-have-you, have instilled in you, and which evidently carry their bias with them. Instead attend carefully only to what is inescapably *given*, that which imposes itself on you whether you wish it or not, whether it fits in with your perceptions or not. This purified residue, independent of your will, wishes, prejudices and training, constitutes the raw data of this world, as they would appear to a newly arrived Visitor from the Outside. We were not born yesterday. We are not such new arrivals, but we can simulate such an innocent, conceptually original state of mind; and that which will be or remain before us when we have done so, is untainted by prejudice, and can be used to judge the rival, radically distinct opposed visions."

But neither the no-where-man, nor the Cosmic Exile is a real possibility. To think otherwise is to be self-deceived. For the no-where-man the common core of human consciousness which is his only resource is too meagre for it to generate a *vision* for him. The candidates for culture-free concepts mentioned in the definition of culture are in fact saturated in culture and are, therefore, linked to a point of view, whatever the nature of this link may eventually turn out to be. Deprived of these concepts and other comparable concepts the no-where-man fails to form *any* vision at all, and therefore, is incapable of making any judgments. About the Cosmic Exile, I quote Gellner again: "It is not possible for us to carry out a total conceptual strip-tease and face bare data in total nudity. We cannot, as Marx put it, divide society in two halves, endowing one with the capacity to judge the other. We can only exchange one set of assumptions for another."

Cultural diversity and the related diversity of visions, including, of course, diversity of epistemic visions, is an inalienable fact of human life. What, then, about self-knowledge which we have claimed to be embedded in the idea of spirituality. I do not here wish to go into questions of incommensurability of visions and relativism that have been raised in the recent debate in the West about the issues of diversity.

I shall limit myself to making just the following point: Although the view that a language embodies a form of life or culture is misleading in many ways, there is an element of truth in it. It is misleading because there are many identifiable cultures in the world, which are naturally multilingual. Take, for instance, the culture of the part of India that I come from: Assam. There are many native languages spoken here - with varying degrees of differences between them. While some of them might, linguistically speaking, be members of a *family* of languages, others may belong to different "families" altogether. However, it will be a grave mistake to split the culture of Assam up into different cultures along linguistic lines. Multilingualism is a part of this culture: people move from one language to another or from one "dialect" of a particular language to another with a natural ease that is hardly like a schizophrenic jump from one world to another, or from one vision to another. The culture, as it were, includes difference or multiplicity within itself. The element of truth in the idea that language is constitutive of a form of life can be stated as follows: Language is a *gift* that, as St Augustine might have said, lights up the world for us. It is a *gift* because of its *givenness*. We cannot set out to invent language, because in order to invent language we must already have a language to invent it in. But every language is a distinct way of lighting up the world. Self-knowledge of the kind that we have talked about is necessarily articulated in language and every language has built into it the possibility of an articulation specific to it. In a multilingual culture such articulation might take an interestingly variegated form. But even if articulation of self-knowledge is presumed to require singularity of language - it will be wildly false to think that this will rule out the possibility of conversations between different articulations and transformations as a result of such conversations. There are traditions of spirituality which are distinct, but which can yet talk meaningfully with each other. A most powerful validation of the truth of this is the utter authenticity of the life and thought of Gandhi.

6

I would like to add here a word about tribal cultures, particularly about the tribal cultures of India. Of course, we have used all kinds of unfortunate adjectives in describing our tribes, e.g. "primitive", "pre-historic", "savage", "uncivilized" and so on. In this, the 19th and early 20th century nationalist anticolonial discourse in India is not much

different from the European discourse of the non-European other in the era of European expansion into the so-called “new” and the “old” worlds. The central European preoccupation with reference to the possible other in the age of colonial expansion was whether he was within the threshold of salvation, conversion, or whether he was irretrievably established in the domain of the Devil. If the former, then, in essence, he is the same as the European although the road to realizing this essence could indeed be hard and arduous; if the latter, then he was beyond hope just like his counterpart in Europe. The anticolonial, nationalist history and anthropology of colonial India substantially retained this distinction between the self and the other - the self in this case being the self of the great Indian civilization. It will be an extremely interesting and instructive exercise to locate the place of tribal India in the intellectual history of 19th and early 20th century India. This will, however, take me too far afield in the context of the present paper.

If, however, my view about the “ought” determining the “is” is correct, then the world that the tribes inhabit are as real and as capable of transformation from within, as the world constituted by the language of modernity. One thing that can certainly be said in favour of the tribal vision is that the disjunction between the disengaged original self and the *samsaric* world of the received view of spirituality that we discussed at the beginning of the paper does not exist in this vision. The world of the tribesman is seamlessly continuous between the inanimate, the animate and the human; she/he is ensconced in the contingencies of time and space as anything else in the world. Self-knowledge for the tribesman, therefore, must be bound by these contingencies. The episteme of the tribal vision is similarly continuous between the natural, the moral and the spiritual. To dismiss this episteme as either irretrievably erroneous or lacking in autonomy is, to my mind, as much of a moral lapse as an intellectual one.

7

Let me at the end briefly address the question of the place of spirituality in the age digital utilitarianism and virtual reality. Digital language is incapable of the following: lying and pretending, of artifice (therefore, also of telling the truth or of sincerity). It is also incapable of expressing the exercise of virtues such as courage, generosity and unselfish attention to the other; the great subtleties of emotions such as love, jealousy, hatred and joy. The great—often-unstated - desire of

humans today is to be able to imitate the machine as much as possible - in fact to become it, if possible. To the extent that humans succeed in imitating the machine, they are in danger of becoming intractably forgetful of their self; and in the eventuality of their *becoming* machines, they will also cease *to be* humans. We are heading perhaps towards a different kind of civilization altogether - where questions, which were crucial to the ones we have known so far, will become pointless. Facets of what we consider humanity, self-knowledge, spirituality and the moral life might still remain, but only as simulacra of their original. Our capabilities and powers of manipulation will increase no doubt to an unimaginable extent, but the transformations that humans shall undergo with this enhancement of their capabilities and powers are also equally unimaginable.

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The Maker of Oriya Fiction :

Fakirmohan Senapati

J.P. Das

While giving an overview of Fakirmohan's life and works, one must start with a brief account of Orissa in the 19th century. It is necessary not only because this will provide a background to Fakirmohan's life and works, but also because Orissa and its people and their problems were the main concern and the core of Fakirmohan's writings.

Orissa was ruled by Hindu kings as late as 1568 A.D., the year in which the last Hindu king died and the Afghans, who were already ruling Bengal, occupied Orissa. Ten years later, Mughals defeated the Afghans and Orissa was annexed to the Mughal empire. In 1751, Marathas defeated the Nawab of Bengal and occupied the province and ruled it for about fifty years. In 1803, the English attacked Orissa and by a treaty, Marathas ceded Orissa to the Honourable East India Company.

During the Afghans and the Mughals, Orissa's peasantry was crushed under heavy taxation and illegal exactions. The condition of peasants became worse under the Marathas, who plundered the land as one would an enemy country. The Maratha rule had been so atrocious, lawless and oppressive that when the English invaders came, the people of Orissa warmly welcomed them and helped them against the Marathas. The Marathas had not even spared temples from depredation and as a matter of fact, pandas of Puri temple, while welcoming the invading army, had begged that the Jagannath temple might be placed under the protection of the British.

If the people of Orissa thought that their condition would improve under the British, they were sadly mistaken. Because of the

faulty revenue policy, Orissa suffered more in the first few years of British rule than it had during the whole of Mughal and Maratha rule. The British introduced a law by which land belonging to landholders who had defaulted in payment of rent, was to be auctioned at Calcutta. Landholders in Orissa could not keep track of these auctions and land passed into the hands of Bengalis, mostly petty officials and clerks under the East India Company. Bengalis were the main workforce of the Company administration in Orissa and they now became landlords too. As a Bengali historian has put it, Bengalis of a low type ruled Orissa for nearly half a century after the conquest.

During these fifty years, the people of Orissa had been further impoverished by rack-rents and the closure of indigenous industries like shipping and salt under the new economic policy. Loss of land and industries not only meant loss of wealth, it also meant loss of prestige associated with them and Oriyas became second to Bengalis in their own land.

It was during this period in Orissa's history that Brajamohan Senapati was born on January 13, 1843 in the port town of Balasore. He was orphaned at the age of three and was brought up in extreme poverty and deprivation by his old grandmother in the house of his uncle who was rather cruel and heartless. As the child suffered from various ailments, the grandmother gave him a new name, Fakirmohan, and offered him to two Muslim saints of Balasore. Though she actually did not give away the child to the saints, the young boy had to live a fakir's life for the eight days of Muharrum every year.

At the age of nine, Fakirmohan went to a village school where he studied for a couple of years. He was married at the age of thirteen, but it was an unhappy marriage for his wife was quarrelsome and hardhearted. Fakirmohan had to earn his living working for his uncle who had a business of making and repairing sails and rigging. Later, he also worked in the government salt office. When that office closed down, Fakirmohan joined school again. Though he was good at studies, he had to discontinue school after some time as he could not pay his school fee of four annas a month. He, however, took lessons in Persian in a school and taught himself Bengali and Sanskrit. He also learnt English from a primer and with the help of a dictionary read English books like the *Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, the Bible and Lamb's Shakespeare.

When Fakirmohan was about nineteen he became a school teacher on a monthly salary of two and a half rupees. Soon after he got a break when the mission school in Balasore appointed him as headmaster on

a salary of ten rupees. He was to work as a teacher for ten years till 1872, when at the age of twenty-nine he left Balasore to start a new career as administrator in various princely states of Orissa. His first job with a native prince had been arranged by John Beams, the linguist, who was then the Collector, Balasore and whom Fakirmohan had assisted in writing the Comparative Grammar of Indian Languages.

During this first phase of Fakirmohan's life as school teacher, Orissa was undergoing rapid changes in social and cultural spheres. Fakirmohan was not only influenced by such changes, he was also instrumental in bringing about some of them. He had set up the first printing press in Balasore and brought out a journal and had founded an Oriya Language Promotion Society. There was a move at this time to impose Bengali language in schools and offices in Orissa; it was even argued that Oriya was not a separate, distinct language but was a dialect of Bengali, Fakirmohan became one of the leaders of the 'Save Oriya' movement, which ultimately succeeded in preventing Bengali replacing Oriya in schools and offices. It was also around this time that Fakirmohan became a Brahmo after toying with the idea of becoming a Christian. His first wife died and he got married a second time to a kind and generous lady, to whom Fakirmohan was to be devoted till her death. However, during this period, Fakirmohan had very little to show for his literary achievements; he had translated Vidyasagar's *Jeevan Charit* and had written a history of India for school children.

The second phase of Fakirmohan's life as administrator was to last a quarter of a century, from 1872 to 1896. He was an able, if sometimes ruthless, administrator and took his work seriously. He had very often to side with the princes against the peasants, and he was to regret this later in life. In 1879 he lost his six month old son and when his wife took to bed in grief, Fakirmohan arranged for the Ramayan to be read to her. The professional reader read the epic in such a way that nothing could be understood. For the benefit of his wife Fakirmohan took up translating Ramayan and read out to her in the evening what he had translated during the day. Translation of the Ramayan was thus Fakirmohan's first foray into literature. Later he translated the Mahabharat and the Bhagawadgita also. In 1892 he wrote a long humorous poem called 'Utkal Bhramanam' about eminent persons of Orissa of the period. When his wife died in 1894, he wrote some poems in her memory.

The third phase of Fakirmohan's life starts in 1896 when he retired from service and settled down as a fulltime writer. By this time he was a well known name in Orissa as an administrator, but with a

nixed reputation. He was encouraged by the editor of a literary journal to write prose and at the age of fifty-four Fakirmohan started writing a long story. The first instalment of this story was published in the journal in October 1897. This story later grew into the novel *Chhamana Athagunth* and this first major creative work of Fakirmohan was to make literary history for several reasons.

It was for the first time in the history of Oriya literature that a book was written about real people in a language spoken by them in everyday life. Uptil now, books were about gods and kings and noblemen, who were far removed from the reader. In *Chhamana*, however, the characters lived life and faced problems as people known to the reader did. When the novel was being serialised, villagers came to Cuttack town to watch the trial of Mangaraj, the depraved landlord in the novel, for they assumed that the writer was narrating a real happening.

When Fakirmohan translated Vidyasagar's *Jeevan Charit*, he had written in the preface that there was very little difference between Oriya and Bengali languages. This was true since the Sanskritised Oriya of the text books was not very different from written Bengali. This was quoted by Bengalis to prove that Oriya was not a separate language. In his novel *Chhamana*, Fakirmohan was now using the language of the common man of rural Orissa which had its own distinct character and had little in common with Bengali. The language of *Chhamana* proved, if such proof was necessary, that Oriya was indeed a separate language.

Chhamana portrays the rural society of the time and is explicitly critical about the system which brought about the ruin of the peasantry. In the novel, Keramat Ali, a police officer (daroga) had gone to Calcutta for some official work and while there had bought a zamindari in auction. Mangaraj appropriated this zamindari through bribery and deception. When he himself was undergoing trial, his unscrupulous lawyer managed to take over the estate. Fakirmohan seems to be saying that there is something basically wrong in the system which allows land to pass hands through such devious means. The novel also brings out the villagers' concern for land and the title itself - a measure of land - underlines the basic fact that land is the centre of social conflicts in rural India.

Chhamana is also a direct indictment of the British system of justice. Oriyas had welcomed the British rule because of the anarchy they had suffered at the hands of the Marathas. They had thought that once law and order were established, peace would prevail. But the legal system which the British introduced had not been tailored to the

indigenous sense of morality and so failed to satisfy people. Mangaraj is convicted for the theft of a cow but is absolved of the crime of murder. Fakirmohan sums up his view of the British system of justice in a passage in *Chhamana*: 'British law says, if you commit a crime and if we get legal evidence, we will punish you. The clever man says, I will ensure that you do not get any proof. The lawyer says, do not worry; give me money and I will make the black white and the white black.' Fakirmohan is at his satirical best while describing the courts and their judges. In *Chhamana*, when the murder trial is going on, the Sessions Judge is busy writing a letter to his dear wife!

While criticising the British, Fakirmohan does not mince words, something no other contemporary writer of Orissa had done. Describing a village pond in *Chhamana* he says: You Indian herons, look at the English cormorants. They come with empty pockets from a far off land and go back after eating up all the fish.

Fakirmohan's next novel was *Lachhama* which is set in the 18th century when Marathas ruled Orissa. It describes the anarchical situation of the period and brings to life the horrors of Maratha plunder and depredation. Fakirmohan comes down heavily on Maratha mercenaries and the Oriya Hindu chieftain of the novel supports the Muslim governor of Bengal against Marathas. In a telling passage, the chieftain's advisor tells the messenger from the Marathas: 'In the five hundred years of occupation of India, the Muslims have not succeeded in doing any harm to Orissa; but sad and shameful as it is, one has to say that if there is an enemy of the holy land of Orissa, it is the Hindu Marathas.' The advisor requests them in the name of religion not to desecrate the temples of Orissa.

Fakirmohan wrote two other novels, the last one published three years before his death. In his four novels, Fakirmohan covers a period of about two hundred years of Orissa's history: *Lachhama* describes the period 1720-1803, *Chhamana* 1803-1840, *Mama* 1840-1880, and *Prayaschitta* 1880-1915. Together, these novels portray the economic, social, political and cultural life in Orissa during these two hundred years.

Between 1898 and 1915, Fakirmohan also wrote twenty short stories. While some of these so-called stories are mere historical accounts of Orissa's rich commercial past, a few others are not of great literary merit. However, at least half a dozen of his short stories are superb literary creations and can rightfully take their place among the best in any language. In his short stories, as in his novels, Fakirmohan shows his deep concern for the loss of the old Indian value system. Though Fakirmohan cannot be said to have been against the western

system of education, he certainly wrote about its bad effects on social and family life. In one of his short stories, a poor old man sacrifices his all to send his son to school. After finishing school, the son becomes a postmaster. He is now ashamed that his father, who does not know English, should be staying with him. One day he asks his peon to throw the old man out, but the peon, illiterate and ignorant of English as he is, cannot bring himself to do it. However, the old man himself goes back to his village and both father and son live happily.

It is because Fakirmohan wanted to inculcate old values in the new generation that he took so much pains to translate not only the Ramayan and the Mahabharat but also some Upanishads and the Bhagawadgita. He also wrote a kavya, *Bauddhavatar* about the enlightenment of the Buddha. A Hindu turned Brahma, Fakirmohan himself was a very religious person and believed in the goodness of all religions. As a matter of fact, he had built a temple in the compound of his house in Balasore in which he had installed images of Jesus Christ, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Shankaracharya, Jagannath, the Buddha and Rammohun Roy. He called this temple Sarvdharm Samanvay Peeth.

As mentioned earlier, Fakirmohan's first literary creations were poems. Fakirmohan says that he had started writing poems for the entertainment of his wife and after her death, he wrote poems to provide solace to his own disturbed mind. In all, Fakirmohan has left behind more than 350 poems, most of which are simple descriptive poems lacking the creative excellence of his prose writings. One thing may, however, be noted about Fakirmohan's choice of subjects for his poems; while his contemporary Oriya poets wrote about nature and beauty and India's glorious past, Fakirmohan wrote on every possible subject including Jesus Christ, the rape of Lucretia and the Russo-Japanese war as also a long poem in popular verse form about the fundamental principles of the cooperative movement. He also wrote some essays including one on the right of Shudras to study the Vedas. However, neither readers nor critics have taken Fakirmohan seriously as poet or essayist, which is understandable.

The last major work of Fakirmohan was his autobiography which was written between 1915 and 1917 and was finished shortly before his death. It is a storehouse of information about Orissa of his time and is written in a style which makes it as interesting as his novels. It is a candid autobiography in which he admits his shortcomings—his oppression of the peasantry, his role in suppressing a tribal uprising against an oppressive raja, and his addiction to drinks. The autobiography also documents his fight to save Oriya language from the on-

slaught of Bengalis, the establishment of a printing press and publication of a journal, the devastation wrought by the famine of 1866 in which one-third of the population of Orissa perished, and gives a clear and detailed account of the social, cultural, political life of Oriyas during the period. The autobiography is so immensely readable and absorbing and so full of facts—and of imagination—that some have even called it Fakirmohan's fifth novel.

In these five books, Fakirmohan has left behind a vivid picture of Orissa with a wealth of information about the various facets of the life of the people. They tell us about the revenue, police and judicial systems, about agriculture, trade and industry, about education and religion, about caste and community, and about the life in villages and towns. Fakirmohan provides so many meticulous details that we know about the food taken, the dress and ornaments worn, and the social customs observed by the different sections of the people of that time. Fakirmohan has become a delight for scholars of all disciplines researching into Orissa's past.

Fakirmohan came back to Balasore, his place of birth in 1903 and he was to live here till his death in 1918. He did most of his writing here and as his stature as a writer grew, his house became a place of literary pilgrimage. However, Fakirmohan had to live the last years of his life in great unhappiness. His unhappy childhood was the result of poverty and the cruelty of his uncle. The unhappiness of his old age was due to a strained relationship with his son Mohinimohan. Fakirmohan was in poor health and lived by himself, with only the memory of his dear departed wife to keep him company.

In his earlier books, Fakirmohan had modelled his bad characters on his uncle and aunt and the good characters on his grandmother and his second wife. In the later works, there was a change in the depiction of women characters because of Fakirmohan's tension with his son and daughter-in-law. A scholar has analysed how the women in Fakirmohan's fiction, written after June 1913, are much more complex than those in his earlier works.

The last work of Fakirmohan was his autobiography which he wrote on the eve of his death, sitting beside the tombstone of his wife. He finished it by the end of 1917 but could not see it in print before his death in June 1918. It was later serialised in a journal—the very same journal which had serialised *Chhamana* more than twenty years earlier. In 1927 Mohinimohan published it, but with arbitrary alterations, corrections, deletions and abridgements; for instance, he had removed all mention in the autobiography of Fakirmohan's addiction to alcohol.

This is the distorted autobiography which was available to the public till 1963 when a more authoritative edition was published after referring to the original serialised version. However, many issues of the journal were not available and eight chapters in the new edition of the book are in Mohinimohan's version. This is a great pity specially since the chapters relate to the childhood and the last years of Fakirmohan's life.

One day when Fakirmohan was reading out his translation of Ramayan to his wife, she had picked up the book and said: 'Why do we grieve for our lost child ? Is it not only because he would have perpetuated our name ? This book is our son; it will preserve our name for all time. Her words have come true. Seventy-five years after his death, Fakirmohan is today remembered for his books. Surely, *Chhamana*, the autobiography and some of the stories will keep his name alive for all time.

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Premchand's Relevance Today

Manohar Bandopadhyay

Premchand is to India what Gorky was to Russia or Flaubert to France. His works offer us a photographic picture of life. He was a visionary chronicler of his time. The account of tragic realities, ironies and contradictions portrayed by him attracts us not just in historic context but for the deep humanism that transcends his characters beyond time. His timeless vision and forthright perception stand out afresh whenever his posterity debates over his relevance. His is the world of simple oppressed folks of rural India—of Jumman Sheikh and Algu Chaudhary in “Panch Parmeswar”, of Halku in “Poos Ki Raat”, of Surdas in *Rangabhoomi* or Hori and Dhanu in *Godan*. It is also the world of small town India—of Vanshidhar in “Namak Ka Daroga”, Vishambhar and Roopmani in “Ahuti”, Suman in *Sewa Sadan* and Jalpa and Ramanath in *Ghaban*. The values and the basic issues brought to bear upon these works have not undergone any spectacular change over the years and therefore Premchand's works still hold a mirror to Indian life.

The quest for reality that dominated the twentieth century literature in one form or other, was the driving force of Premchand's writings. He drew attention of his readers in the editorial of the first issue of *Hans*: “To create stimulation in literature, it is necessary that it becomes mirror to the realities of life.” What is also striking is not the depiction of reality but the nature of reality that he dwelt upon. He took up the burning issues of his time; social, political, economic and religious, and laid the foundation of the realistic novel in Hindi. When he dawned on Hindi fiction, the Romantic trend was in full bloom. An author of lesser genius would have been easily swayed away, satisfied with the works like *Kankal* and *Titli*. He could have as well delighted in the themes of alienation and individualism sported in

Utopian imagination. But he kept at bay the Romantic fascination. The Hindi novel during that period was also under the spell of Devaki Nandan Khatri, Kishori Lai Goswami and Gopalram Gahmari. Their works proliferated in the world of *tilasm* (mystery) or adventure. It fed on illusory craze of the readers and dabbled on coarse entertainment and moralising exercise. Rescuing Hindi fiction from this grip, Premchand introduced the stark realism in his novels and short stories. He drew upon the everyday event and real world characters setting a new trend in Hindi as also Urdu fiction. Even as it was an affront to orthodox mind, the common readers welcomed it since it reflected the life and sufferance of the age without distortion. He had an uncompromising integrity with the existing throb of life and was never excited with the antiquity. Once while going round Patna Museum he showed no interest in the exhibits of Mauryan and Gupta period but his enthusiasm was roused when he saw the models of tribal villages. He quite often asked the poet, Jaya Shankar Prasad, "Why do you dig out the buried bodies?" The day-to-day happening of the real life remained his substance from the beginning till end. The struggle of the common man and the oppression of the socio-political tyrants has not only continued down our own time as portrayed by Premchand but has further vitiated giving way to criminalisation. It assumes significance since Premchand focused upon it in one of his earliest novels, *Premashram* (published in 1920):

"They are all jackals in disguise, virtual hordes of plunderers. They have no concern with what is happening with the poor. They have no mercy in their hearts. One is ruler, the other *tallukedar* and some one usurer. All feed upon the blood of the poor, burgle their tenements and come to decry the downfall of the country."

The malaise is not much different today. The agonies and problems of the peasants of Pandeypur village in *Rangabhoomi* or the Belari village in *Godan* are far worse than what Premchand painted. This amply enhances the relevance of his works even after nearly seventy years.

At the time Premchand was writing his novels, there in the west Joyce and Virginia Woolf were exploring stream-of-consciousness technique for their novels. Such technique or that of free association or montage or even psychoanalysis were irrelevant for Premchand because his genius moved on a far wider orbit of realism to produce the masterpieces like *Godan* and "Kafan". The latter even heralded a new

age in Hindi short story, the Nai Kahani which influenced a host of writers for successive two decades. Whereas the concern of the later writers was the individual, Premchand's was the man in his social tapestry. Even when his characters revolted, it is inconceivable to assume them as isolated individuals. Through these variegated characters Premchand depicted a particular problem of his time as the reigning theme of each of his works. What is notable is the paradoxical irony emanating in their sufferance. Halku, the peasant in "Poos Ki Raat" is least upset that his crop is being devoured by the wild animals. He is rather comfortable that the loss will at least give him riddance from farming to become a worker. Also in "Sawa Ser Gehun", Shankar, the drudging farmer finds it unbearable to remain in the clutches of the village usurer and thinks it profitable to become a wage worker. Noticeably, in several other instances, Premchand showcased the drift of the despaired peasants as urban or village labourers.

For his sympathy with the dispossessed, much ado has been made of Premchand's Marxist views. In an interview given to a Marathi writer, R. Tikekar, published in *Pratibha* in 1935, Premchand said, "I am a Communist but my communism is of a different kind." In fact Premchand upheld the positive features of different political faiths which would suit the Indian conditions and therefore did not identify himself with any 'ism'. In *Rangabhoomi* he pointed out, "True socialism is based on humanism and social awareness." Even as he disagreed with Gandhiji on certain issues like the acceptance of dominion status, he did support a number of moves of Gandhiji like the change of heart of the capitalists and maintained, "In my communism the estate owners, traders or any one exploiting the formers will not exist." This underlines the reformatory viewpoint of Premchand. The earliest of his demand for social reform was demonstrated in *Kishna*, *Prema* and other works wherein he also pleaded for social protection to women. The incidents of molestations so rampant in modern India had begun to show up during thirties too. In *Rangabhoomi*, the teenagers, Gheesu and Vidyadhar attempt to molest Subhagi, almost their mother's age. Precisely for such imminent evils, Surdas suspects the consequences of industrialisation. The white soldiers in *Karmabhoomi* molest the beggar woman who in the end knifes them to death. Through these episodes Premchand drives home the need for protective measures against such crimes. Eventually his realism turns to be the idealistic realism. The *Karmabhoomi* has been even called as the novel of transformation. Notably, with *Rangabhoomi*, Premchand emerges as the precursor of Hindi political novel.

Premchand had foreseen the crucial need of unity and harmony which alone could hold the country together. He would have been the saddest soul to witness the anarchy due to these twin factors thrown overboard. He dramatised in his works the power of the unity and harmony which could stand up against the deadliest enemy. The blind beggar, Surdas, in *Rangabhoomi* who wages a lone battle against the tyranny, underscores this need: "Our players are not united in the game. We fight with each other. No one sees beyond himself." Surdas dies a martyr but before his death, he exhorts the villagers: "If you have to rehabilitate your deserted houses, strengthen your unity." There are numerous icons of communal harmony in Premchand's canon who make sacrifice for a common cause irrespective of caste and creed like Ibrahim Ali in "Juloos", Sophia in *Rangabhoomi* or Saleem in *Karmabhoomi*. In *Godan*, to demonstrate solidarity, the entire village, the Hindus and Muslims alike, comes out to say good-bye to Gobar, the poor peasant's son. In Premchand's vision, the crucial priority of the nation was the Hindu-Muslim unity. In one of his essays, titled, "Hindu-Muslim Unity", he stressed, "What is paramount is that we should set aside the false history (of each other) from our minds and form our opinion on the basis of the nation and the time." He showed in the novel, *Kayakalp* how obnoxiously the fanaticism of Hindus and Muslims could play havoc in the Indian milieu.

The all-embracing openness of Hindi fiction today owes a great deal to the paradigm of language set forth by Premchand which he called Hindustani bearing the vivacity, punch and liveliness of Urdu. His views expressed in favour of Hindustani in the famous Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad meet presided over by Gandhiji in April, 1936 in Nagpur was accepted by most political luminaries among whom were Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and C.Rajagopalachari.

Hindi fiction may have broken grounds of newer dimension today, exploring alien chambers of consciousness and proliferating on obscure intellectual idiom, but it is impossible to overlook the foundation laid by Premchand as a fearless author of social realism and political awakening for which his works are as relevant to us as during his life time. In spite of all onslaughts, the culture of rural India is not very different today from the agrarian India and when we live through the latter, the works of Premchand make us live it preciously again.

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Cycling Into Time And Space : Kedarnath Singh's *Tolstoy Aur Cycle*

Anamika

I don't recall where but I had read it once that to ignite their imagination old stalwarts do strange things. Tolstoy rode his pony and amidst the thickest of mist, he rubbed his feet against the snowy ground. Milan Kundera, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Nirmal Varma and Rajendra Yadav have different answers and explanations to this very very critical question of running out of inspiration. Four popular devices are (i) dignified silence (ii) change of genre (iii) creative distortions in terms of stylistic departures and (iv) humour, the healthy guts to laugh it away and offer oneself as yet another Confucius/Socrates/the grand old man who knows it all.

What is striking about *Tolstoy aur Cycle* is that it comes up with the fifth device of cycling into time and space with the satchel of grain, salt and racial memories hanging down the shoulders and the basketful of history and green vegetables tied down to the carrier at the back. In this high tide of utilitarianism, one must learn one's living by rendering useful services to the humanity, all mature men now know this, and women, both mature and immature, have known it since times immemorial.

The anthology does give us useful insights into the art of living and surviving against all odds, surviving one piece into this merde-merde world of public and private break-downs. On the front rod of Tolstoy's old cycle Kedarnath Singh offers his reader a pleasant ride to territories : rough and hitherto unexplored. He takes us to the elements and archetypes: fire, water, manuscripts, nests, ancient authors (Tu Fu, Li Pai), ancient haunts (Bhutha Bagh, Lahartara), monuments and forlorn places (Kushinagar, Peetha Tikane ki Jagah), subaltern spaces (Pani

Bechnewale, Kailshpati Nishad, Ibahim Miyan Oontwale), war fronts (Iraq Uddh mein Ek, Ghayal Bachche Ko Dekh Ker), folds of Ted Hughean nature (Lukhri, Ek Pashu Ki Karah, Patjhar, Chintiyon ki Rulai, Raat Ki Awaajen), legends (Milarepa, Buddha, Tolstoy) and the dark crevices of mother Earth 'who rocks the fallen leaves to sleep'.

With the grace of Neruda's 'Ode to the Elements,' Kedarjee takes us back to nature and his strength lies in the fact that he resists mystifying it. He encounters nature with a partly modern and partly post modern mind set. Like a Columbus he discovers new hemispheres and draws out maps tracing the history of our moral geography. Instead of discovering the flora and the fauna as playthings of an inscrutable deity he views the elements, historical and legendary figures and fellow human beings as manifestations of common human frailties and aspirations.

Even in his "prayers" (like "Pani ki Prarthana") we encounter the authentic (truly human) voice of secular individuality : not some solemn dance of allegorical Everyman acting out a bloodless theological paradigm but the enactments of the intensest kind of people with very real occupation (Ibrahim Miyam Oontwale, Pani Bechnewale, Kailashpati Nishad). They meet and part, fight and lose or win their small battles, make love and commitments in places one can actually find on a map (B.H.U., Trinidad, Lahartara) Even God and godly figures here are so human, the real gods of small things (as in Ishwar aur Pyaaj or Anand in 'Buddha Se') – so human indeed that they strike as the externalization of the yet unrealized human potentials and aspirations:

"Pata to yeh chala, Bhante
Ki Angulimal chchutta ghoom raha hai shahar mein
Aur Sujata apne shahar ke
Kisi chutha aspatal mein bharti hai
Anand ki mujhe koi khabar nahin
Par ek din ek purane dhabe mein
Ed Pahari ladke ko
Platen dhote dekh main dhidhak gaya tha bhante
Uaka nam Anand tha"

And still more important is the democratic timbre of the text. Like a friendly and affectionate fellow seeker the poem enters in a gossip mode and there are no hierarchies implied between Le Pai and the horse, Ishwar and Pyaj..... Kedarnathjee is not one of those who think of humanity as an undifferentiated mass, waiting to be bullied or cajoled by the enlightened few into a programmed uniformity of spiritual

felicity. His is the characteristic timbre of a liberal humanist : small scale, intimate, suspicious of big heroes and sweeping solutions. Most of the poems signal a preference for the dialogic and ironic over the solemnly monological: for scepticism over belief, questions over answers.

Water is Kedarjee's basic element. He evokes water as Whitman evokes the self. Like St. John Perse of France and Derek Walkot of the West Indies, who have made water a voice and vehicle of their reflective mode, Kedarjee also is drawn towards water – not with the curiosity of an amateur naturalist, not with the sensibility of an innocent lover either but with the pathos, the 'Karuna' of Buddha. The way lean Buddha would have felt drawn towards water after his morsel of Sujata's 'payasam' ('kheer'), Kedarjee is drawn towards water:

"Water—the first citizen of the earth—" who talks to God about his last bits of supersensuous experience on the drying patches of the earth – the sensuous 'glu-glu' down the throat of a 'hakasa piyasa' (damn thirsty) animal. It also talks about its shame of slipping through the cupped palms of a thirsty shepherd. Finally it talks about the chit-chut twitter – twitter of 'chirai-churung', 'menus-amanus' along the banks of the river of existence.

'Trinidad' is a poetic reflection on the diaspora. In Trinidad the poet meets the salt in the sea. He also meets the 'bidi' (the cottage-cigarette) on the Caribbean sands and a strange kind of smell on the shore:

"a light smell
spread not only in the island
but also in the dust on roads
and in the twitter of birds.
It came neither from the coconut grove,
Nor from the fish cooking in the kitchen"

It actually comes from the old bearded ocean because the ocean alone knows which grain of sand holds what, which particle holds imprints of the first ship on the shore, which holds the drop of blood that fell from the bruise of the first migrant labour beaten black and blue. The linguistic connectivity of a submerged 'bhojpuria dhun' and the hodge-podge in the world of memories – distant and remote – link the poet also to the amnesia of the diaspora. This is the cross-section of history and geography. This is how the sense of time filters through the sense of place. This twilight zone of being and not-being raises a little Hamlet in him: 'Pray, love, remember : and there is pausies that's for thoughts. (*Hamlet Act IV S 5L176.*) The water also prays but it is difficult to visualize a prayer so secular and an Ishwar so fond of 'onions'.

The poem 'Pandulipiyan' glimmers with strange insights on intertextuality:

'aap payengen wahan shabdon ne peeskar samay ko
barabar kar diya hai
aur wahan sara samay ek jagah is
tarah hai
ki apko lagega jaise Brahmasutra
Parh raha hai Muktibodh ko
Aur Shakuntal ka hiran
Kuch kah raha hai Padmawat ke totese
Aur beejak ka koi pad
Kisi pothi se chitak kar
Manu Se bahas kar raha hai
Aur Raso ki koi sabse purani prati
Dheere-dheere gungana rahi hai
Kisi yuva kavi ki koi kavita.

Some of Kedarjee's muktaks here also seem to be humming Raso and Padmawat and Kabeer. His metrical compositions have the frightful flicker of the wings of a bird returning to a room locked up for years, the room which still treasures the long-deserted nests, nests 'not available in bazaars'— "Wahan sirf pinjare milte hai."

Buddha keeps figuring in the poems, smiling at the ironies of Pokhran and at other ironies too like that of viewing Iraq war as yet another film, of the status of Hindi on a westernised campus or a tall tree, a Babool in Delhi.

Intertextual flights are remarkable not only in 'Pandulipiyan', but also in 'Tu Fu, Li Pai', 'Tolstoy aur Cycle', 'Poos ki Rat' and the 'Milarepa-poem'.

Not even once is Kedarnath Singh overtly loud in his concern for the subaltern: Kailashpati Nishad, Pani Bechnewale, Smarak Ibrahim Mian Oontwale, Aag Par Chalnewale or even the lesser among the flora and the fauna (Lukhri, Chintiyani, Kacche Amrood for instance) look genuinely intimate, as intimate as the dead father or the woman without an umbrella. The 'lomri' of 'Bagh' has flashed in his local dialect as 'Lukhri' this time and sounds still more intimate.

Village flickers in the memory of the first generation migrants of the east almost like fire. 'Shaherbadal' 'Thikra'. 'Pettha Tikani ki Jagah', 'Bhutha Bagh' and 'Lahartara' have the sure touch of a line drawn parallel to the city life. Almost with the confidence of the kid who makes necessary alterations even while copying down from the blackboard the poet here comes up with intelligent maneuverings.

Like all the celebrities of world poetry today—Paz, Walcott, Heaney, and others, Kedarjee also is very much rooted in his racial memory. His poems are as much local as universal, as true to his times as to his place. In fact, they enter their time through their place. The best of his poetry rekindles the personal, inter-personal and racial memories so as to establish some kind of a cultural, historical and mythical bond between the man and his milieu. In the present scenario, in fact, the most interesting development is that the barriers between nations seem to be breaking at last and all the nations, old and new, with authentic local colours, seem to be reaching out to one another, flowing into one another producing magnanimous intertextual, palimpsestic currents.

The great age of Radio is over. TV reduces war to a mere video game show. And with a quizzical sense of being Kedarjee's kind of poetry starts flourishing at a point where terror and humour, anger and celebration, nihilism and mysticism meet and a cool approach to life takes over. Nearly all the poets of his generation come to the realization that balance of action and reaction must be exquisitely and organically, not quantitatively and mechanically adjusted.

Stirring up the sediments of dark thoughts and half-ideas through the masterfully unconventional idioms Kedarjee here is charged with a passion at once personal and cosmic, self-castigating and profoundly affirmative. With a powerful mix of emotions and sensations— he is basically struggling with the old romantic problem of how to infuse a world of fascinating but chaotic sense data with a transcendent meaning, especially at a time when it is deprived of a common myth. There is little room left in poetry for the good natured banter of the yesteryears, still with its prose readiness, ritual intensity, direct feeling and casual speech, Kadarjee's kind of poets keep trying their best to do with words what lovemaking attempts to do wordlessly—replyaing the subtlest shades and echoes of a complete human experience so as to make us more truly, more sincerely human. Exploiting the linguistic potential of a race to its full, they kept replaying the subtlest shades and echoes of a complete human experience. To read this collection is to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat the endless prosopopoeia of the tormented Hindi public sphere.

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Dark With Sorrow, Pure As The Ganga

Mahabaleshwar Sail's *Kali Ganga*

Damodar Mauzo

Konkani literature had a late start due to reasons, mainly political. The language itself had to fight hard through centuries for its survival. Invasions, conversions and persecutions forced the Konkani speaking people to migrate to different parts of the country. People in different regions remained cut off from one another. Though Konkani is the Official Language of the State of Goa today, the language and literature have suffered heavily at the hands of 450 years of history. The Portuguese had gone to the extent of proclaiming a decree banning the use of Konkani even in speech. But the language survived the threat and continued to remain the *lingua franca*. Literature suffered because of the stringent censorship imposed by a dictatorial colonial regime, but post-Liberation Goa has seen a tremendous upsurge in the output of literature. Today the Goa government has bestowed Official Language status on Konkani and literature is being produced in abundance especially in Goa and Karnataka. Even Kerala is contributing its mite. However, it is poetry and short fiction that rule the roost. Besides *Romans*, a popular form of romantic novels in Goa and a few novels written in Karnataka, Konkani writers took a long time to take seriously to writing of novels. Occasionally, novels and novellas were being published but not in significantly large numbers. However, the seventies and eighties witnessed some masterpieces that became widely popular and later went into translation into other languages including English. The novel of the nineties is undoubtedly *Kali Ganga* by Mahabaleshwar Sail, the novel that created quite a stir in the world of Konkani literature.

Mahabaleshwar Sail hails from the rural areas of North Canara

bordering Goa and Karnataka. Despite the linguistic oneness and geographical contiguity, there is a marked distance between the peoples. The novel, besides meeting literary excellence, has also served another purpose.

At a time when Konkani activists are seen working hard to strengthen the bonds between the peoples of different regions and to hold Konkani speakers in Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala together, this excellent work of fiction has brought the people emotionally closer. Mahabaleshwar Sail's novel is an outstanding piece of fiction that helped realise that though years of separation have brought about some superficial changes in society, the Konkani sensibility has remained the same.

The novel takes the reader on a unique journey along the river Kali. The people, the animals, the birds, all come alive in his narrative. The descriptions of the orchards and long stretches of fields, the hillocks that roll as far as the horizon, the villages that nestle by the river with their traditional fairs and temple festivities are simply superb. The novel is a celebration of man's kinship with nature evolved over the centuries.

With multiple themes and multiple sub-plots it is a well knit story, the work of a master craftsman. Ganesh who has lost his wife at childbirth is devastated. He keeps blaming his daughter, Suman, for the tragic death of his wife. Manjul, the elder daughter of Ganesh, despite tender age, takes upon herself the duty of giving motherly care to Suman. The writer has skillfully developed the relationship between the sisters vis-à-vis the village folk. When Manjul comes of age and gets married, the father suddenly finds himself helpless and depressed. The younger daughter then takes over as if she has grown up overnight. However, Manjul's marriage is not a happy one and she, against her wish, has to return home to deliver her baby. Suman is forced by the circumstances to take charge of the situation. Meanwhile, Ganesh has lost his mental balance. Heartbroken Manjul dies leaving behind two children. Soon after, Ganesh commits suicide. Manjul's husband, a selfish man cashiered out of the army because of his drinking habits and foul behaviour, tries to make advances on his sister-in-law but on getting a stern warning disappears in the middle of the night. Suman's childhood boyfriend Govind is the only help she can count upon. Govind, who loves her, stands by her side all through her difficulties. But his family conspires to separate him from Suman. When Govind does not agree to it, he is forcibly dragged away by his brother. As they were crossing the river, Govind ends his life by jumping in the middle of the Kali river. The novel ends on a sad note as Suman is left with no one to lean upon.

Though the plot mainly deals with the plight of the two sisters who are fated to suffer it is representative of womankind of rural India. Suman who was blamed by her father for having caused the death of her mother had to nurture her father. She had to attend to the entire delivery and post-delivery care of her sister who had once been a mother to her. The sub-plots too, speak volumes of woman's sufferings. The tragic tale of the young widow Shobha who kills herself by jumping into a well to escape the evil advances of her father-in-law is yet another telling commentary on it. The woman's inheritance of endless sufferings has become an accepted truth in our society and if anyone attempts to break free from it society is prompt to castigate her. In *Kali Ganga* the author has portrayed the timeless reality of rural society of Karnataka which is also evident in societies across the country.

Though it is a story of Manjul and Suman it gives a bird's eye view of the agrarian villages along the Kali river of Karnataka. The structure of the novel is based mainly on four pillars: the descriptions of nature in all its moods; the references to superstitions, religious beliefs and the folklore still practised in the region; the characters portrayed with all their virtues and foibles and lastly the well-paced plot that keeps the reader glued to the book. The author does not lose his grip on reality as he recreates life in this region bordering Goa and Karnataka. With the help of the folklore and the anecdotes the writer tells the tale of the settlers who had to undergo enormous hardship. The novel provides valuable insight into the sociological framework of the rural areas through the descriptions of how the village was founded reminding the reader of the craftsmanship of Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The matter-of-fact narrative adorned with a simple poetic style, beautifully brings home the harsh reality of how tampering with the ecological bond can displace individuals and uproot social groups.

It also depicts the psyche of the village folks, who keep quarrelling over trifles, but stand united in the face of misfortune. The descriptions of religious traditions and the folklores of the region are tactfully employed by the author to give glimpses of the practices that are being fast forgotten in the process of urbanisation.

Kali Ganga is a brilliant work of fiction by Mahabaleshwar Sail that opens up new vistas for the reader. The novel unfolds the life of the Konkani people in Karnataka's villages, on the banks of the Kali, bordering Goa. The title is symbolic of the life of the people - dark with sorrow yet pure as the Ganga. The pun is therefore significant.

The novel reminds the discerning reader of the epic novel, *Maralli Mannige* by that great Kannada writer Shivram Karanth.

The best way to survive in life is to meet all problems head on and try to find one's own way out, the author seems to be saying optimistically throughout the novel. Yet, he takes refuge in convention by making Govind commit suicide at the end, thus making the character weak. Otherwise the entire novel has been crafted in a refreshingly unconventional manner. The novel has been published by National Book Trust in English translation.

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Turning Memory into Experience : Manmohan Bawa's *Yudh-Naad*

Tejwant Singh Gill

The most memorable work to appear in Punjabi literature during the last two years is a novel, *Yudh-Naad* (2004) written by Manmohan Bawa. It deals with the relentless resistance put up by the village republics against the invasion that Alexander, the Great, launched against Punjab, termed Panch-Naad in those ancient times. To be precise in the historical sense, it happened around 326 B.C. The way this young man, intent on conquering the world known to him then, marched from afar heading the marauders was the initiation of what kept on happening during the subsequent centuries. At that historical juncture, there were kings who by subverting the village-republics had set up small kingdoms in their own territories. They either surrendered tamely to the megalomaniac invader so much celebrated in history from above or accepted his suzerainty after driving their people into a headlong collision, only to become in imitation of him his indigenous variants. With historical and structural variations, such has been the dispensation of Punjab in the subsequent centuries. Paradoxically, the first resistance was put up by people holding to history from below on the soil of Punjab that had its replications in the subsequent eras as well, but how frequently of this there is hardly any account in documents preserved or unpreserved.

So martial music was what arose from the soil of Punjab, reaching its crescendo in one respect and falling into precipice in another. No wonder, the novelist has so named his novel, appropriate both in the short and the long run. As conversation remarkably recorded between Edward Said, the eminent critic and Daniel Barenboim, the charming musician, so candidly reveals (*Music and Society*), music always bears

the marks of parallels and paradoxes. It aims at equilibrium between extremes, covering a torturous path between the noise that precedes its beginning, and the silence that succeeds its ending. Something of this sort happens in this novel, with the difference that the impulse driving into it is of imperial megalomania versus popular resistance, the resonance arising therefrom is the conquest of territory bringing into view expanding horizons of alien lands versus the homeland, never alienating, ever embracing, loving and nourishing. Though sounding academic, the name given to the novel, opens upon what went on about two and a half millennia back on this land of Punjab.

Drawing upon documentary evidence of Alexander's march to conquer the whole world known to him, the novel has Ajay Mittar, an imaginary character as the protagonist. This strategy of exercising his main focus on an imaginary character when so many beings from history were there to be taken care of, is not meant just to meet the formal requirement of a historical novel. Documents of this era of two and a half millennia back, depicted Alexander, the Great, in glowing terms while drawing the picture of hordes set on the arduous journey right to the borders of Punjab. The commanders, who were at his beck and call to execute his imperial design, were also mentioned though not in as glowing terms. So far as the other side went, Porus was there who put up a great fight, only to strike an honorable reconciliation with the so-called all-conquering hero. In recompense, Porus himself began nurturing the ambition to forge for himself such a role in Punjab after Alexander had departed from the scene. For the novelist, such a mimetic role was unbecoming for a hero to assume at that historical juncture. Then Chandra Gupta Maurya, under the tutelage of Chanakya was also around. No doubt, he was destined to become the ruler of Magadha after Alexander left for his native kingdom, only to meet with death before reaching there. The whole turmoil taught him that to be the ruler of the kingdom of Magadha only was not enough. All land extending to the west of it down to Taxila where the turmoil arose required forging into a vast kingdom. Chanakya was there to suggest rules and regulations for administering such a vast kingdom before which paled into insignificance the ill-administered territories conquered by his role model. This also could not carry conviction with the novelist because this adventure seemed to him the mirror-image of playing havoc with the territorial integrity of Punjab, so dear to the inhabitants as their motherland. Interestingly enough, there is one full chapter (no.31) in which an elaborate discussion ensues between Chanakya and Ajay Mittar who, to all intents and purposes is the advocate of

the territorial integrity of Punjab as inhabited by people living harmoniously in village-republics. His past significance acquires present meaning because the novelist feels no reluctance in portraying him as his own ventriloquist as well.

In all essential respects, he differs from Chanakya. He does not believe in making diplomacy his criterion, unlike this high-profile Brahmin who elevates it to the transcendent level for making its rigorous use at the immanent level. For Ajay Mittar, authenticity is the criterion as a result of which, he feels aligned with humanity, of which ordinary human being is the representative. As against it, the view that Chanakya professes to have about ordinary human being as the representative of humanity sounds so different:

Ordinary person? He busies himself only in eating, sleeping, fearing others and rearing children. All this animals also do. Only knowledge distinguishes a human being from animals. (p.166)

Knowledge for him is power to which Ajay's objection is to the effect that everyone cannot be in possession of knowledge. To counter this, Chanakya extends his argument so as to make his interpretation sound both authoritative and authoritarian. He holds,

Only a person of knowledge, who by implication possesses power as well, has the right to rule over the weak, the ignorant and relish all the luxuries of life.(p. 166)

Ajay, who has no claim on knowledge as vehicle of power, cannot reconcile with his ideology, smacking of authority and authoritarianism at the same time. The trajectory that he chalks out for himself takes entirely a different direction. It is to impel the village-republics to shed away their nonchalance, realize the mortal danger Alexander's onslaught poses to their autonomy and commonality and come out successful from the ordeal so that their growth into national-popular and equalitarian-democratic direction may be assured.

When the novel begins, Ajay Mittar is close to the camp where Alexander stays with his army, busy chalking out a strategy to bring Porus to his knees. This area is not alien to him though he is originally the inhabitant of a village-republic existing between rivers Iravati and Vipasha, now known as Ravi and Beas respectively. He has deliberately chosen to be there in the capacity of what in anthropology has come

to be known as participant analyst, with the difference that in his specific discipline, he does more than devote all energy to the collection of facts for analysis, evaluation and reevaluation. But here he is also to cultivate experiential awareness that may evoke participatory presence, sensitive contact with the world to be understood, affinity with the people, and concrete perception of what goes on at this critical moment of great historical proportions. No wonder, he has picked up acquaintance with Alexander's associates, particularly with his commander, Argos, but not with the insidious intention to pass on information about his strategies to the native kings. Likewise, he takes pains to gather information about the steps native kings propose to take for safeguarding their kingdoms from the onslaught that is so imminent. By collating information from diverse quarters, he does not make a fetish of it. He infuses discrepant elements into it and tries to grasp the cataclysmic situation from as many sides as possible. So he is a charioteer, interpreter and sculptor, along with. It is for this reason that in the course of his conversation with Chandra Gupta, who later on appends the genealogical epithet, Maurya, with his name, Ajay leaves him to marvel at his ingenuity, acumen and erudition.

While residing close to the garrison of Alexander, he also comes into contact with a tribal maiden, Madhvi, forcibly kept there for the delectation of Argos who at the moment is away to eavesdrop about the military strength of Porus. At the moment, she is in the custody of his subordinate who casts an evil eye on her. On the other hand, she develops great fondness for Ajay that very soon grows into devotion for he cannot reciprocate her love for him at the physical level. His beloved, with whom he is engaged, is there at his native place, pining in separation from him. He also misses her in his heart of hearts though the historic mission that has brought him to Taxila does not let him give vent to his feelings. When he confides this fact to Madhvi, saying, "I have left behind my beloved whom I am going to marry on going back" (p.63), she takes his confession in her stride and is willing to be at his beck and call in the capacity, he deems fit, be of a maidservant, bondswoman even.

While portraying this side of man-woman relationship, the novelist seems not to have paid adequate attention to the verisimilitude. It is well nigh improbable to believe that such a notion of romantic love held sway then over the minds of men and women. Be that as it may, Ajay is a male professing lasting love for his beloved who pines for him in his native place. The devotion that Madhvi has for him does

not stay without eliciting its own reward. In the absence of Argos, Janus, his subordinate, tries to molest her, which in the eyes of Ajay, is an outrageous act. So he challenges him for an encounter at an isolated place that results in the death of the antagonist whom he not only reveals his identity at the last moment but also imparts a crucial lesson about the inevitable course of history:

“Don’t remain engrossed in illusions, Jason. Every nation in history comes across a moment when certain happenings take it to the highest pedestal. But no nation is destined to stay there forever.”(78)

As a result of this encounter, Ajay’s departure from Taxila becomes imminent and inevitable. It is not only because his survival depends on his departure but also because his mission is complete and the next thing essential to do is to be with his people, to organize resistance against the onslaught from which there is going to be no escape at all. So on horseback, he begins his journey to his native place that is at a distance of about two hundred miles. Since the Greek soldiers are on his heels to capture him, so to make his horse gallop on the straight path is not possible. He has to indulge in hide and seek, journey by detours, have recourse to forced stay at untoward places. No wonder, more time is required to reach his place. Nothing disheartens him however, he continues to fare forward, stay in cottages of women rendered miserable by one contingency or the other and acquire deeper understanding of the autochthonous people. He has also to seek shelter in the Buddhist and Jain monasteries. The responsibilities with which social beings burden the animals, becomes clear to him in no uncertain terms. Then it seems reprehensible because animals are so integral a part of human life. Now it seems outrageous because it is an invitation to ecological disaster. Hence his realization:

“Animals? Wild animals are far better than human beings. They kill only to assuage their hunger. Human beings? Just for their greed, the realization of their desires, they keep on killing so many innocent persons, even.”(103)

The present meaning of this issue of past significance is evident enough. So is of the following realizations overloaded with metaphysical-cum-religious convictions:

“Rituals are meant for foolish persons. Those who follow others ritualistically, eyes closed are deprived of experience and intellect. In the Vedas and Shastras, a lot is there that is useless and irrelevant. What is proper or improper, true or false, worthy to accept or reject, is to be decided by the person himself.”(114)

Quite evident is the present meaning of the following observation as well:

“Realizing the truth does not mean the knowledge of the Shastras. Also it does not mean to memorize the scriptures. Imperative is it to test them in the crucible of experience. Only from experience can truth be gathered.”(114)

The conversation that Ajay carries on with Arya Naag, convinces him of the veracity of this observation:

“Alexander, whom you call cruel, megalomaniac, is a first-rate disciple of Krishna, the practitioner of his precept”(12400)

Inevitably this leads to the following conclusion about *Gita* that is almost iconoclastic:

“In *Gita*, war is held inevitable. According to Krishna’s logic in *Gita*, the world is about to end but man is immortal. Life is not real but is imaginary. ..If life is imaginary, illusory, then all this glory, this renown, is a bigger illusion. Alexander set upon world-conquest for his own renown and glory. Likewise Duryadhana deputed Karan to to conquer the world. So did Yudhistra dispatch his horse to all the lands for his own renown and glory. None may be remembering that, inebriated with the vanity of world-conquest, Karan and the Pandvas unleashed countless cruelties on this land of Sapt Sindhu.(124)”

Equipped with this multi-faceted realization, deeply aligned with the destiny of Punjab both in retrospect and prospect, Ajay reaches his native place. His primary job is to impart sense of unity, determination to resist to the people of his village-republic that with all his hegemonic haughtiness, Alexander had never envisioned in his life as a conqueror. Ironically enough, the moment he reaches there, he comes to know that

his beloved, destined to be his bride, has been married to the headman of a contiguous village-republic. This is because the word has gone around that Alexander's invasion is imminent and there is the urgent need to strengthen the bonds, loosely prevailing amongst the village-republics. Forging marital relationships is the most potent method for cementing this unity, before which the danger of extinction looms like a demon. His beloved protests while going to be married to a stranger in preference to Ajay who has grown up with her from childhood. Just after reaching his destination he is overwhelmed with sadness. Though the romantic feeling marking their reactions is not in keeping with the verisimilitude of the time, yet both accept with equanimity the inevitability involving their separation for the rest of their lives. "In a village-republic, no individual resolve can override a collective decision"(191) is what all believe in and they both reconcile themselves to this unpalatable happening in their lives.

Become the commander of the youth of the village-republic, Ajay trains them for a guerrilla warfare. So determined do they get to resist the onslaught that, notwithstanding victory on their side, Alexander's soldiers end up as hysterical beings. Such is the anti-climatic picture they present even after coming out victorious:

"None knows how and why they began to utter at first sighs then hysterics, and all the pains, injuries and troubles, arising from the privations they went through from several years, turned into tears only to flow in torrents from their eyes."(p.209)

Inevitably, realization dawned upon Alexander's mind that by waging a war with the people of the village-republic, he has stepped into a labyrinth from where no retreat is possible. The labyrinth in which Alexander gets stuck, further worsens when the other village-republics come to their help. A united front is forged by them that renders the labyrinthine situation of the Greeks further precarious. So far they have been adept in launching invasions. It for the first time that they get subjected to invasions, which they have neither the strength nor the forbearance to face at the new juncture. In the final battle, they lose almost one-third of their soldiers in the battlefield. All their equipments get destroyed. So much loss they had not sustained throughout the seven or eight years they remained on the warpath. For Alexander himself, the consequences prove as disastrous. As recorded in the authorial voice, "this invasion shattered him completely. Such was the change to occur in the course of a single day that the monarch

overflowing with self-confidence and vanity changes from a world-conqueror into an ordinary person.”(272) All these happenings are overwhelmingly traumatic for Alexander who on way to his native kingdom dies a very heart-broken man.

For Ajay Mittar and heads of other village-republics who fight shoulder to shoulder with him against Alexander and his hordes, these happenings are no less dramatic. The head of the contiguous village-republic, whom his beloved had married, dies a valiant death. She feels woebegone but acquires equanimity at the end. Porus, egged on by Alexander’s commanders, tries to mould himself in the image of the megalomaniac emperor. Little realizing that what is tragic on its first occurrence, end up as its opposite when repeated, he gets killed at the hands of his unruly soldiers. Ajay Mittar has an encounter with Chanakya who tries to persuade him to become his associate. Such is the opinion that he has forms of him:

“I have been observing you for the last so many days. In my heart of hearts, I have come to rate very highly indeed. The truth of the matter is that the image of the ideal person I have formed in my imagination, of a valiant Kashtri, committed to his principles and convictions, above any vested interest and personal greed, all these qualities you so remarkably possess.”(p.316)

He coaxes him to become the ruler of Magadh and then expand it into an empire covering the whole of the sub-continent. Ajay Mittar declines his offer with this contention:

“How can I embrace the ideology that I have been opposed to from the very beginning? What can be more ridiculous and absurd?”(317)

Seeing that his dream of forging a vast empire does not win over Ajay Mittar who is deeply committed to a popular and participatory type of polity, Chanakya strikes a strategic type of compromise with him. He draws a commitment from him that the popular and participatory republics will come to the aid of the empire with center of gravity in Magadh whenever it is invaded from across the borders. His prognosis rests upon the premise that with the Western borders of the empire secure against invaders, it shall be possible for the empire to expand in other directions. Under Chandra Gupta, who to fulfill

Chanakya's dream assumes this role, invasions from the West come to a stop. But it is only for a limited duration because the center of gravity of the empire does not shift to Punjab. The peripheral republics do not remain popular and participatory either. Not only does the empire with center of gravity in Magadh reach a dead end so far as expansion goes, it fails to sustain itself in face of centrifugal forces of the disruptive type.

It is only after more than two millennia under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that an empire, with center of gravity in Punjab and also claiming affiliation with popular and participatory governance, happens to be there in this part of the sub-continent. Not only invasions, from across the borders come to a stop, the people have the feeling that though a kingdom, it is vitally concerned with their present, if not the future. It is a different matter that this dispensation also does not last beyond a period. May be, both Chanakya and Ajay Mittar kept history at bay while dreaming about polity, authoritative and authoritarian for one or popular and participatory for the other. Though history has kept faith with neither but memory has preserved their trajectory along with all their parallels and paradoxes. The excellence of this novel, *Yudh-Nadb*, lies in turning this memory into experience, both with efficacy and veracity.

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Premchand Revisited : *Kulliyat-e Premchand*

M. Asaduddin

This essay is not about 'one' book that is of significance to Urdu literature that came out last year but about the complete works of Munshi Premchand¹, compiled for the first time in Urdu. It is not only regrettable but a matter of shame for us that even after seven decades of his death we do not have definitive editions of Premchand's work. This failure becomes all the more stark when we remember that Premchand is not only regarded as a father figure of Hindi and Urdu literatures, but also, in some sense, a national icon. Any meaningful research, as opposed to mere tentative statements, on the writer can take place only when we know which of the available versions of his texts - in Urdu and Hindi - should be taken as authentic/ original. This year we are celebrating his 125th birthday with impressive largesse both from the central government and the state government of Uttar Pradesh. But no one seems to care about basic textual research that will help us excavate the real Premchand and understand him better, which reminds one of Tagore's line, "We worship you, (and in the process) remain oblivious of you."²

* * *

Premchand occupies a unique position in Indian literature. He pioneered the genre of fiction in two language literatures, i.e., Urdu and Hindi. He was instrumental in giving Urdu-Hindi fiction - novel and short story—a realistic base, divesting it from its preoccupation with the world of fantasy and romance, and contributing significantly to the development of the genre. A champion of progressive literature,

under the influence of Gandhi and some western thinkers, he identified himself with the masses, especially the peasants, and used his pen to depict rural life in India—its poverty, deprivation and the resilience of people amidst much dehumanization. It is a common misconception that he began to write in Urdu and, then, for various reasons, switched over to Hindi exclusively as the language of his choice. The truth of the matter is that though his books published in Hindi sold much more than in Urdu, he continued to write in both the languages till the end of his life. To corroborate this view one may adduce the case of “Kafan” which is regarded as his last short story (or at least, the last substantial short story) which was originally written in Urdu. However, this issue of Urdu Premchand vs. Hindi Premchand is immensely complex, and has multiple ramifications that defy easy resolution. He wrote his works - novels, short stories, non-fiction - either in Urdu or Hindi. If he wrote originally in Urdu, then the Hindi version was prepared almost immediately, either by him or by someone else. Then both the versions would be sent for publication. The timing of the publication would, of course, depend on the alacrity or the lackadaisical attitude of the publisher. The publication date of a work does not always accurately represent the date of original composition and language, i.e., Urdu or Hindi. This can be best illustrated by the publication history of the novel, *Bazar-e busn* which was written in Urdu, but was published first in Hindi with the title, *Sevasadan*. It is for all these reasons that determining the primary/ originary text and thus arrive at a fairly accurate/ approximate chronology has great importance in Premchand studies. This edition of complete works in Urdu edited by Madan Gopal addresses some of these issues in some detail though the rigour and persistence that is required in such research is sadly missing.

* * *

The current compilation of Premchand's works in Urdu was initially projected as a 22 volume series, according to the following scheme: vols. 1-8 (novels), 9-14 (short stories), 15-16 (plays), 17 (letters), 18-20 (miscellaneous writings), 21-22 (translations). Later on, the plan was slightly altered. The total compilation, as it stands now, spans 24 volumes, and reverses the order of the last two categories. That is, Premchand's translations have now been compiled in volumes 18 and 19, and his miscellaneous writings have been collected not in two volumes, as projected earlier, but in five volumes, i.e., vols. 20-24. One might have reservations about how some materials, earlier available

only in Hindi, have been rendered in Urdu, and this may very well constitute the subject of a separate dissertation, but the more important fact is that for the first time the entire corpus of Premchand is available in one language".³

* * *

Let us take the case of short stories first. For a long time, the general impression both in Hindi and Urdu circles was that Premchand's complete short stories have been put together in Hindi in the series known as *Mansarovar* consisting of 8 volumes, two volumes of which had come out in Premchand's lifetime from Saraswati Press owned by him. The remaining six volumes were published by his elder son, Shripat Rai. All the volumes of *Mansarovar* taken together contain 198 stories. However, it soon became apparent that *Mansarovar* compilation is not an exhaustive one. Premchand's younger son Amrit Rai dug out a large number of stories from old newspapers and journals and published them in two volumes with the title, *Gupt Dhan*⁴ (Secret Treasure). The two volumes of *Gupt Dhan* have 56 stories between them. In addition, Shripat Rai and Kamal Kishore Goenka collected twenty-six stories that were not easily available earlier, and put them together under the title, *Apraihya Kahaniyan* (Rare Stories). In Urdu, however, about two hundred stories have been available in about fifteen odd collections published from time to time. In the 6 volumes of the current compilations all Premchand stories available so far appear in Urdu version and they number 302. However, this figure also is neither definitive nor unproblematic. This is because they contain quite a few pieces that read like autobiographical fragments or mere recording of stray thoughts. To designate them short stories would be stretching the definition of the story too far. Leaving aside the question of numbers, it must be stressed that if we want to arrive at a holistic view of Premchand, we must access both the Hindi and Urdu versions of his works. They are no mere carbon copies of one another but have significant differences that throw up complex questions of authorship, literary tradition, language, translation and so on. Neither version, singly, can represent the author. If he changed the title of many of his stories in their passage from Urdu to Hindi or vice versa ("Panchayat" in Urdu becomes "Panch Parameshwar" in the Hindi version, "Haj-e Akbar" becomes "Maha Tirtha", "Islah" becomes "Pashu se Manushya", "Nok Jhaunk", becomes "Brahma ka swang", whereas "Shatranj ke Khiladi" in Hindi becomes "Shatranj ki Baazi" in Urdu, "Mritak Bhoj" becomes "Zaad-

e raah", and so on), shifting the emphasis, in some others (e.g. "Maha Tirtha") he has changed the name of characters. Further, matters have been added or deleted while preparing the other version. Sometimes, within the same sentence, a word or a term has been changed that has resulted in change of focus. In the justly famous story, "Shatranj ke Khiladi" many details in the Urdu version pertaining to the culture of decadent Lucknow are missing from the Hindi version. In another celebrated story, "Poos ki Raat" the ending in Hindi and Urdu versions are not only different but radically opposed to each other, and admit of different kinds of readings. An entire section at the end of the story in the Urdu version is missing from the Hindi version.

* * *

Similar problems are encountered in the study of novels too, particularly in the novels of his early phase. They have travelled freely from one version to another, and the writer himself seemed to have forgotten which was which. Sometimes, the theme of an earlier novel that did not find favour with the reading public was worked upon in a later novel. One can have some idea of this from the following long extract from the editor's introduction of the first volume of the *Kulliyat*.

"Premchand's first novel is *Asraar-e Ma'bid*", which he began to write between 1901 and 1904. This novel was published in the weekly, *Awaz-e khalq* from Banaras, under the name Dhanpat Roy Sahib alias Nawab Roy Allahabadi. Neither Premchand himself, nor any of his friends ever mentioned *Asraar-e Ma'bid* in their writings. In 1942-43 when I was writing a book on Premchand in English, I had read Hisamuddin Ghori's "Premchand Sog", which was the writer's tribute to Premchand when he died. It was published in *Awaz-e khalq*. Hisamuddin Ghori knew Premchand through correspondence. They might have met in Bombay. In my book written in 1943-44, I referred to *Asraar-e mohabbat*. In his study of Premchand Indernath Madan picked up the details from my book. I went to Banaras again in 1948, and enquired about *Awaz-e khalq* from Shivrani Devi (Premchand's wife) and Mehtab Roy, Premchand's step brother. They too had no information about *Awaz-e khalq*. I tracked down the office of the journal after a prolonged search. I looked into the old files

but could not find any clue about *Asrar-e mohabbat*. After 11 years Amrit Roy came to my humble abode and the talk veered towards *Asraar-e mohabbat*. He said that no newspaper by the name of *Anar-e khalq* was ever published from Banaras. I told him that I had been to the office of the newspaper and that I had several issues of it. I showed him one. Then Amrit Roy went there, found out the novel. Its title was not *Asraar-e mohabbat* but *Asraar-e Ma 'bid*. One issue pertaining to 1.9.1904 could not be traced. The novel too was incomplete. The last instalment of the novel was published on February 1, 1905. This novel was published by Amrit Roy in *Mangalacharan* with the title, *Devasthan rahasya*. The language is the same, only some difficult words from Arabic and Persian have been replaced by Hindi words.”⁵

There is also controversy about the second novel - whether it was *Kishna* or *Hum- kburtna o humsawaab*. Literary historians have tried to determine the chronology by looking at the reviews or notices that had come out at the time. But reviews and notices are not always accurate indicators of publication dates/ years of books. *Hum- kburtna o humsawaab* was published in Hindi as *Prema*. Premchand worked upon the theme of *Hum- kburtna o hum-sawaab* in the writing of his novel, *Pratigya* which was published in Urdu as *Bewa*. If all this sounds so much like a merry-go-round, the last detail of this convoluted tale is that the ending of *Prema* and *Pratigya* are different although they have the same set of characters!

The publication history of *Bazar-e husn*, Premchand's first major novel is also no less complex. It was written originally in Urdu, but the Urdu publisher took a long time, in fact several years, before publishing it in 1924. Meanwhile, frustrated by the lackadaisical attitude of the Urdu publisher Premchand prepared the Hindi version under the name *Sevasadan* (one can clearly see the shift of emphasis from the Urdu version to Hindi one even from the title) and sent it for publication. The Hindi publisher not only published it with alacrity, in 1919, but paid him much higher royalty than his Urdu publishers would ever pay, which may have been one of the factors for Premchand's switch over from Urdu to Hindi.

* * *

It should be clear from the above discussion how Premchand studies is fraught with problems that emanate from textual indeterminacy. A good deal of textual research must first go into determining the master text. Advanced research on the writer can follow from there. Once the 'originality' of the texts are established, it will be easier to speculate on the changes that have taken place in subsequent versions. Madan Gopal's compilation is, by and large, a mere compilation. The editorial input lacks the analytical rigour to examine competing versions of the text and arrive at definitive conclusions. However, its importance lies in the fact that it has made us aware of the fault lines in Premchand studies as never before.

References

1. *Kulliyat-e Premchand* vols. 1-24, Delhi: National Council for Promotion of Urdu, 2000-2004
2. The original Bangla - *Tomar pujaar chhole tomay bhulei thaaki*
3. Though Premchand always believed that Urdu and Hindi are one language with two styles of writing, and he addresses this issue comprehensively in his non-fictional writings, because of historical and political reasons, a separation had taken place between the two, even in his lifetime. Among the new generation there are very few readers and scholars left now who can access these two 'styles' with equal competence. The Hindiwallahs and Urduwallahs often go their own ways, without being aware of or interested in what is being written in the other.
4. *Gupt Dhan* was published from Hans Prakashan, the publication house owned by Premchand's family, in 1962.
5. 'Dibacha', *Kulliyat-e Premchand*, vol 1, pp. vii-viii

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A New Genre of Story Telling : Hrusikesh Panda's *Michha Khusi Sata Dukha*

Lipipuspa Nayak

Michha Khusi Sata Dukha (False Happiness, True Sorrow) is the eighth collection of stories by Hrusikesh Panda (b.1955), the well-known fiction writer of Orissa. Credited with seven novels, eight short story collections, and four plays, Hrusikesh is noted primarily as a major writer of fiction for his intense understanding of rural and tribal myths and situations, bold and authentic handling of social themes, his original imagery, passionate humanism, his command over Oriya diction, dialects and idiom, and his sarcasm and humour.

Michha... carries three long stories written over three long years. Hrusikesh has not written anything else during these three years. Each of the stories has attracted unusual attention in reading circles of Orissa, and one assumes, will do the same for the Indian readership, when rendered into English.

The work is a genuine trilogy. The subtext that lends its components thematic coherence is the tale of victimisation of the 'lesser' mankind - the tribal communities. Hrusikesh has been writing about the marginalized communities of Orissa since the beginning of his career (his collection *Hawks and Other Stories*, Vikas Publishing House, has at least six stories on the subject) with authenticity in facts. But unlike earlier, where reality often gets a laconic treatment, it is treated in meticulous details in these three stories. Truth has been seen from very close and polygonal angles - the drawn out ordeals of the marginalized people amid the usurious *sabukar*, the machinating miller recycling the rice of the public distribution system; the usurpation of land by the indifferent bureaucrat; the timber trafficker and the traf-

ficker in minerals and human beings, and with explicit and implicit conviviality with some people from the marginalized communities. And this truth has been recollected explicitly, yet not photographically. The creative wisdom and brilliance of the writer replaces the sympathetic tone in the earlier stories with a dissectional one.

Anabara Comisonnka Eka Report (A Report Of The Starvation Commissioner), the first to appear in the series, recounts the episodes involving the starvation death of Premashila Bhoi, a tribal woman. The death, in the wake of media coverage, prompts the government to set up a commission of enquiry with the starvation Commissioner. The story puts the issues in governance in a clearer perspective. Clearer, because *Anabara...* is in the form of a report and a plain first-person narration. How did Premashila die? Did she die of starvation? Or from illness? Was her illness due to her prolonged semi-starvation? Did she have no food because her land was mortgaged to the moneylender that she could not recover, and went away to Andhra Pradesh as an indentured labourer?... In this widening maze of polemics, truth is certain to haze away leaving the reality as it is. Premashila was weighed down by forces both beyond her reach and too close to escape from; a system where economic values give way to polemics and semantics. The entire system of governance is subject to the mechanics of public opinion-making and the universal standards of conventionality. The story, in the form of a report by an official, elevates to a polyphonic critique of the brutal forces operating in the system of social justice. At one level, this complex story stalks the tragedy of Premashila, which too is the tale of economic decimation of the western districts of Orissa in the later half of the last century. At another level it is about discovering truth and the risks of it that can overtake the tragedy. The refusal of the people, who have drawn powers from the starving citizens, to acknowledge responsibility is the ultimate tragedy, the ultimate subornation.

Anabara... also transcends the tradition of Oriya stories in the intense understanding of a woman. Premashila, the lithesome beauty who ends up an emaciated starved body fit for the front-page headline of newspapers, has kept up her battle of survival with incredible assiduity. Portrayed passionately she emerges tall in the end; a tragic protagonist who sustains the story leaving the issues of poverty and exploitation at the fringe:

That it was impossible to go on living this life of chaos and uncertainties, Premashila understood

before long. She remembered a song her father used to croon when she was a little girl. The song's burden was this: if the husband was of no use, the wife had to do the shift for the husband; she had to go to the gods and ask for their blessings. But then the riverbank where the brick kiln stood lacked a single tree, not to speak of a god. So Premashila started saving money. She saved despite that waist high cottage, despite the unauthorised entry of so many people, despite being molested, and despite the uninvited appearance of people all through the day and the night, despite there being no door in the cottage and despite the back breaking toil through the day. She also collected from the brokers information about the arrival and departure of trains (p.98, in translation).

Baruali Gaanre Kaju Badam Chasha O Bimbadharara Bhagya (Cashew plantation in Baruali village and Bimbadhar's fate) narrates how the entire agricultural landmass of a tribal community is usurped by the district collector and his subordinates. But the tragedy here is not emblematic. There is a tension on the part of the protagonist, the successor of the erring collector who tries to reclaim the land for the community, albeit, unsuccessfully:

In this job of government officialdom, with its edginess and uncertainties, and with the knowledge that death is a certainty, why do people like Bhabanishankar (the ex-collector) and the bidi-smoking sub-collector grab the entire farmland of an inaccessible frontier village of Orissa, driving its villagers to destitution? (p. 75, in translation).

But the tension is subsumed in a strong treatment of irony and ends in an ironical self-deprecating rediscovery of the protagonist: the villains have become successful promoters of modern educational institutions. There is despair, but there is self-ridicule of the authorial-self. There is some scope for hope too. The palpably manifest feminism of *Anabara...* is here too, undertoned no doubt, in the shrill voice of resistance of a gen-next young woman, in all possibility, an extension of the protagonist.

Michha... the eponymous story to appear last in the series chronicles a century of misfortune of the mineral-rich land, Orissa, targeting the industrialist-politician-bureaucracy nexus as its mines are plundered in the false pretext of industrialization. This loot also includes the exploi-

tation of local labour and destruction of geography, ecosystem and economy. The story ends in the persecution of Sthitaprajna, the Manager-protagonist of an iron works plant - the agent of resistance. The twist in the story comes when Sthitaprajna's persecution comes through on a false allegation from a representative of the tribal community. Yes, there is this role reversal, credibly crafted against the issues of political correctness. As if to fulfill the prophecy of Gore Vidal that no good deed goes unpunished, the irony comes full circle. The labourers led by their tribal leader persecute the protagonist, who has been trying to save them from destitution. The story disturbs in its futuristic ending, where the author fast-forwards to a society of fifty years later, as Sthitaprajna's trial lingers on long after he is dead. Even in the delineation of this hypothetical and sad reality, there is a stoic detachment of the authorial-self as his wisdom and austerity fail him in the glaring absurdity around. The tragedy of Sthitaprajna, the public institution and its workers sublates into larger political, historical and economic dimensions.

The sub-texts of these stories end up as social, political and economic issues in Orissa, though the texts are about the protagonists. The stories testify to the elevation of the author, both as a writer and an activist, from the tragic quagmire to which he had been subjected. The stories have transcended their author, his parochial base, and convey universal concerns. Any talk of neo-realism in the Indian literary context often ends in a theoretical critique of it. A view, prevalent and rather powerful, dismisses the feasibility of post-modernist writings in our literature, largely on the premise that we lack the insecurity, trauma and isolation that can generate this genre of writings. The only genuine post-modernist writings possible in India must arise out of neo-realism generated by the feelings, experiences, undergoings of writers who had such fortune and misfortune. Can we downplay the sad and occasionally tragic representations of Oriya literature in these three long stories by one of our finest writers? *Michha Khusi Sata Dubkha*, an illustration in brilliant fictionalization of unfortunate subjective episodes, is as post-modernist as possible in the Indian context.

Michha Khusi Sata Dubkha (Oriya short story collection) by Hrusikesh Panda, Friend's Publishers, Cuttack, 2005, Pp.115; Rs.60

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A Significant Collection of Poems : *Jajneswar Sarmar Kavitali*

Ananda Bormudoi

One significant book published in Assamese in 2004 is *Jajneswar Sarmar Kavitali*, a collection of poems of Sahityacharya Jajneswar Sarma, meticulously edited by Kabin Phukan. This is the best edited book of the year at a time when many authors just collected things, printed them and claimed themselves to be editors. Phukan's collection includes published and unpublished poems written by the poet over half a century. The editor has taken utmost care to give a correct text to the readers free from mistakes of any kind. The poet's language is a breakaway from conventions and the editor has worked very hard to annotate the poems. The poet extensively read Sanskrit, English, Assamese and Bengali literatures and was familiar with oriental and occidental cultures alike. His knowledge of the East and the West, and especially his knowledge of the spiritual tradition of India, has a bearing upon his poetry. Modern readers and young poets today are likely to find certain things difficult in the poems without an annotated text. Phukan has rendered this service to them.

Phukan has thoroughly studied the life of the poet to trace the formative influences upon him. The spirit of liberal humanism in the poet is explained in terms of the early influences of shaiva-shakta and vaishnabite family influences. That was further strengthened by liberalism in English education. The poet started composing poems regularly after retirement and obviously instead of trying to write the most fashionable poetry of the time he tried to refashion poetry itself. This refashioning made most of his critics sceptical. Some critics simply dismissed him as a poet and many others kept silent respecting his grey hair. Kabin Phukan has rediscovered this poet who would have otherwise passed into oblivion.

Jajneswar Sarma is a conscious and deliberate artist in the making of his poems. He knows what he has been doing and he is doing it with a purpose. The poet edited a collection of Assamese poetry titled *Satapatra* in 1937 and he wrote a very meaningful preface to it. He wrote in the preface how Assamese poetry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed its sustenance to Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. He was himself a teacher of English literature and was familiar with poets like Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Spender. His extensive readings actually turned him back to his own spiritual tradition and his poetry sprouted from it. He sparingly made use of the montage effects and mythic adaptations popularized by Anglo-American modernist poetry. He wrote primarily to amuse and instruct. He referred to his poems as a class not acceptable to the elite.

In Assamese poetry high modernism of the nineteen fifties gradually gave way to poetry that is more readable and closer to the rhythm of social life. Nature and countryside staged a comeback in the sixties. Young poets began to write poems of anger and protest. Jajneswar Sarma shared the feelings of the young poets and wrote poems serene in tone but sharply critical of contemporary social life. He breaks away from the poetic pre-conceptions and conventions of his time consciously to such an extent with his own poetic diction that he himself was pretty sure of unacceptability of his poems and he called them 'antics'. But what by conventional standards might look unpoetic may also invite closer attention of an unbiased reader. Kabin Phukan, a major contemporary Assamese poet and a critic, has taken so much interest in Jajneswar Sarma precisely for this reason. Phukan's editing is a re-interpretation of the poet. He has re-discovered Jajneswar Sarma.

A striking feature of Sarma's poetry is a storyline in his poems. Situations and events are concretized with the help of a story line. The technique owes its origin to the ballads. Incidentally it may be mentioned that a few great modern Assamese poems have asserted their greatness through this ballad like quality. The poet has drawn heavily from folk tradition and also from the lives of the contemporary country folk. At the time when many of his contemporary modernist poets considered subject matter in a poem a pretext for realizing the poetic experience, Sarma wrote on subjects clear and concrete. Most of those subjects also look quite improbable as poetic material. Meaning and interpretation of a poem depend to a large extent on the expectations of a reader and the reader's expectations depend on his acquaintance with the poetic conventions. In a bid to equate poetry with life, Sarma chooses for his poems subject matter which might look curious

and strange for most readers. However, as one goes on reading one finds how the poet relates an apparently trivial subject to something very serious. An example is the poem "Why Are You Croaking, O Poet". The poet compared to a frog is unlikely to entertain the fellow poets. But the poet interrogates those who blindly imitate and echo what has already been said by their predecessors: "Do you have anything new to say? / You are just lisping/What is this croaking for?" The poet is impatient with trash circulating in the name of poetry and says: "Do we need a poet to tell us that the betel-nut tree is straight?"

The critical faculty is as important for a poet as the creative imagination and Sarma possesses both. He wrote in one of the prefaces that his poems had no market value. He knew that the market for poetry was also not above the law of demand and supply. The poet is expected to know what the readers want. Sarma knew it but he did not give the reading public what it demanded. He chose to indulge in what he himself termed antics. These antics, by appealing to the sense of the ridiculous, intend to re-define the scope of poetry. Even in short lyric poems anything related to any aspect of life can be a subject and treatment is all that matters. The humorous treatment does not make trifle with the selected subjects and a jest is also an earnest in the womb of time.

In a poem "Grandfather's Verse", the grandchild complains: "Your poems resound with the songs of the cuckoo and the nightingale/I hear no poor man's weeping/The naked and the starved like skeletons/Are homeless and own no land/Such men and women are in millions/Look! they stand lining up." The poet is no diehard communist but his concern for the immediate social reality is genuine. He wants poets and artists to rally around suffering men at the time of their need. He feels that hypocrisy and falsehood of the leaders have infected the poets and the artists as well. The characters and situations in his poems are mostly from villages, and that also from the poor villages in Assam.

Navakanta Barua in a poem included in *Dalangat Tamighora* (1999) stated that perhaps it was a mistake to exclude God and Nature from poetry. The modernist Assamese poets are city poets in their thoughts and sensibilities. The complexities of modern city life did not affect life in the country side where the masses of the people still faithfully observed all religious rituals and participated in a collective life. Most of the themes in Jajneswar Sarma's poetry are those excluded by the modernist Assamese poets. Sarma can write a poem on a poor farmer who joins *nam prasanga* with great devotion after doing his daily round

of ploughing in the field. He has written poems on vegetables and medicinal plants nearly forgotten by the people. His poetry from this point of view is a kind of useful poetry. At the time when stress on the cerebral muscles and the influence of symbolism lent inbuilt difficulty to modernist Assamese poetry, Sarma wrote poems that poetry lovers could read with profit and pleasure.

The young poets can learn things from Jajneswar Sarma. Kabin Phukan's Preface to *Kavitarali* is enlightening. This collection and the Preface may very well open up discussions on scope, function and definition of poetry. All told, *Kavitarali* is a very significant publication in Assamese in 2004.

Jajneswar Sarma's Kavitarali (Asamiya poetry-collection), ed. Kabin Phukan, Vidyarthi Publishing, Dibrugarh, Assam.

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Defining the Grammar of Poetry: Nachiketa's *Madhyampurush Ekvachan*

Pramod Kumar Jha

Poetry, it is often thought, is an antonym of *Pedantry*. I have often found that the poets reserve a silent laughter for the scholars and their pursuits. But it is rarely the case that an individual could have within himself personalities of very different kinds, combining a poet, an analyst, a critical thinker and a performing arts persona – all at the same time. Maithili, my language, has been singularly lucky in having got a poet – one of the finest in the country, who also happens to be an internationally acknowledged linguist. The poet of the anthology called '*Madhyampurush Ekvachan*' in Maithili, which I consider to be the best thing that has happened in my language in the publishing field in 2005, is one such example. As a media person myself, and as an avid watcher of the way performing arts has evolved in the present-day Maithili, for which a lot of credit must go to the poet-playwright 'Nachiketa', I have often wondered how the poet has lived in so many of these roles with ease. I am afraid I have no answer to this mystery.

'*Madhyampurush Ekvachan*' is a significant book from several angles. The collection of poems by this author – Udaya Narayana Singh ('Nachiketa' is his pen-name) is his fourth collection of poems, the other three having been published between 1966 and 1981. Therefore, the anthology was much awaited, although the poet had been publishing numerous plays in Maithili in the intervening years. Secondly, while the first book of poems – '*Kavayo Vadanti*' (1966) was an epoch-making anthology of a budding poet, '*Madhyampurush Ekvachan*' is a fine example of a sensitive and matured craftsman of Maithili. In fact, it redefines the poetic diction in Maithili in many ways, and defines the grammar of poetry. Many of these poems have appeared in original as well as

in English translation in the mean while, but the collection gives an opportunity to the interested readers to see how much Nachiketa has changed from his last collection, 'Anuttaran' (1981). Thirdly, this also sets a challenge to Maithili publishing world as it has mind-boggling illustrations by the well-known painter, Sanjay Bhattacharya - which adds so much to the final product. Of course, some of his other collections were also lucky to have had eminent writers to illustrate. But this particular book sets a rare example of quality publishing. Fourthly, it is the first book in Maithili that a major publishing house like Vani Prakashan has brought out, perhaps as a mark of recognition of Maithili in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. Their finesse in production is evident even if we look at the cover design, on the body of which we get a powerful stanza or two "Ki iyEh chal o antim raati...?" from the poem 'Prashnavali' ('The Questions'):

"Was this the night of doom immobile?
 Was this the song so endless wild?
 Could you read the lines of my poem agile?
 Is this the day of the world's end?
 which prompt n' tickles me to god-send
 the long-lost body or a boat divine?..."

The book has 33 poems in all, and as rightly claimed in its opening statement in the jacket, they represent 33 names of 'sun' - the ultimate source of energy of all our life. It includes two poems - one each from his two earlier collections with minor changes, and they serve the post-modern linkages of *inter-textuality* so well here. The most important quality of his recent poems is the attempt by the poet to touch base with the rural Mithila - especially the depiction of the life and times as well as the landscape of the region to which he belongs - the Saharsa-Sonbarsa belt of North Bihar.

The mythical connection and utilizing the linkage with the past to create memorable lines can be easily seen in his opening poem - 'Quarrel with the Ocean' - in English title, published in *Indian Literature* some years ago, as well as in other pieces like 'Damayanti ken upadesh' which opens with the following description:

"Near about the bank
 limbless splayed lie many men -
 spavined powerless men
 held back by sedge and leaves.
 Wrapped around a sisal

a viper swings on -
'Damayanti, Damayanti' -
the solitary forest shudders and shrieks.
Through florets and leaves the purple sun peeps
in
with great caution.
Light pierces through the goldanged body
and then shows its thirty-three faces -
though not even one of them resplendent..."

The general tone of Nachiketa's early poetry was terse commentary on the contemporary social situation and also the references they would make to the classical texts and narratives. It is not that the sarcasm is completely absent here; A sample would be '*My Will for the Praying Poets*' :

The latter is not lost here either but the added quality has been that '*Madhyampurush Ekvachan*' includes some of the finest love-poems that Maithili has ever seen - in a refreshingly new kind of language and style of composition. Here are a few examples of memorable lines (in English translation):

Nachiketa's experimentation with meter and matrix have only added value to the texts included here. Even in his English rendering published in different poetry magazines, some of it has remained; Consider the following lines from 'Conspiracy':

"I don't know why
moods of floating letters in sky
have become so bitter!
I don't know whether
the fierce wave of fire-spitting weather
can make them better!

Can it make this clear,
explain
that the poet was not to blame
that all this was the game
of the earth,
so that the shapes don't appear
to them and sign
in delight feminine
so that they could neither

put on a novel
garb of meaning
nor could they be clouds and revel -
rain and dance in joy unceding!”

An interesting feature observed in many great poets of the present times – namely, making ‘language’ as a subject of poetry, or a persona – is a common thing in this collection, as lines like the following are many –

“Trees and plants have now learnt
Where does poetry come from.
They have now known history, human barbarity.
How great forests were leveled thoughtlessly....”

We see a great variety of poems, subject-matter and approaches here – which is also a strong point. The feminist stand taken by the poet in several of his creative pieces here must be made mention of. I cannot resist the temptation of quoting from a poem written in memory of his sister here:

“With a lot of pain
comes out
the sound of silence
or of a word
from within.

Inside, somebody sits in a distant cave
and weeps;
Inside, someone laughs aloud sitting on the peak
of a mountain;
Inside, you hear someone walk with caution,
noiselessly;
Inside, you could hear the sound of
opening of an envelope-
From there, words bubble up in a cauldron
of each letter - visible in each line!

It takes a lot of pain
to realize the cost of your tears, Sister!”

Nostalgia seems to have occupied a prominent place in the topics dealt with in this collection. A strong poem depicting this sense of the by-gone era can be seen in *Katte barsak baad* ('After how many years'). The poem was first presented in a poet's conference in Madhuvani, and has since then ranted in our years as a very sensitive cry of someone who returns to poetry after so many years. It has surely been a very rewarding experience for me to have come across a book in Maithili of such high standards in 2005.

Madhyampurush Ekvachan (Maithili poetry-collection) by 'Nachiketa' (Udaya Narayana Singh), Delhi: Vani Prakashan. Demy 8vo. Pp.96

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Life on the Margins: Sara Joseph's *Maattaatthi*

A.J. Thomas

Sara Joseph, the leading fiction writer of Kerala, is noted for her literary skills as well as for her activism in women's causes. Beginning with short stories in the early eighties, she wrote novellas, and, of late, came out with a novel trilogy. The first of the three, *Alahayude Penmakkal* (The Daughters of Alaha), won her the Sahitya Akademi Award of 2003. The second, *Maattaatthi*, (The Female Foe), takes the life-story of one of the leading characters, of Alahayude Penmakkal Lucy, further. *Othappu* (The Scandal), the third and last, takes the narrative to the present times, and brings out the inner contradictions inherent in the Christian community specially as it struggles alongside modernistic living styles, and also the results of mindless materialism swallowing up the middle classes at large.

The book under review here, *Maattaatthi*, analyses the extraordinary relationship between Lucy, the waif, and Brigitta, the matriarchal spinster who possesses Lucy in a strange way. Brigitta is ever ready to pounce on her and beat her up with her walking stick, for even slight lapses, real or imaginary. How Lucy makes her own space in the oppressive situations around her, how she celebrates life in her pauperized state, how she has her own opinions about everything the average conformist acquiesces about, amazes the reader.

The novel opens with Lucy's attaining puberty, the beginning of her menstrual flow, which she celebrates all by herself. Lucy is a natural poet; her poetry consists in her actions in consonance with the environment around her. She is a natural nurturer, having cows, goats and chicken she rears, beds of spinach and other green vegetables she waters, drumstick trees and pea-creepers she tends to. She revels in the new

flowering of herself; she laughs with the sun, she dances with the coconut fronds.

Lucy, who finishes all the chores of a household single-handedly, getting up at dawn and working hard till past 10 a.m., invariably reaches school late, and is regularly punished by P.T. Peter, the dwarfish, pumpkin-like headmaster, who is also the maths teacher who begins the day on every working day of the week, with homework checking, and sums for the kids. Lucy is generally impervious to corporal punishment, as if she relishes it! So, the other students call her 'one screw loose....' While the girls refuse to sit on the same bench with her because she carries the stench of cow dung, the boys are gallant: they say that she carries the fragrance of fresh milk, and are sympathetic to her, and mindful of her plight....

As the novel unfolds, Lucy is shown in relationship with the social setup, in detail. Even as she goes to the pre-degree college after her school final, she experiences sexual assault by a teacher, by way of groping and a bear-hug when others weren't looking; but that was enough for her to lose trust and to discontinue the studies she wished to pursue against all odds.

In the midst of all the privations, Lucy holds in her heart a secret admiration for Setu, the hero who 'streaked,' running naked from the steps of the co-operative Bank, till the gate of the Arts Club. Though Lucy was pained by this little aberration, she secretly loved him passionately, a desperate love, against all hope of fulfillment.

In between, the struggle between the haves and the have-nots is vividly portrayed—the charismatic parish priest (reminiscent of Father Joseph Vadakkan, the crusader of the poor, who defied the Church authorities for injustice against the deprived), who is committed to building houses for the homeless versus the real estate lobby that acquires all prime sites, to build housing colonies and resorts, eating up paddy fields in the process, a common sight in present-day Kerala.

The end to Lucy's inversely idyllic existence comes to an end as Brigitta dies finally. Lucy, who was raised by Brigitta like a granddaughter, and yet disinherited by the old woman's miserliness by not bequeathing to her at least something for her subsistence, is turned away mercilessly by Brigitta's kin, who are greedy to grab her property. Lucy takes to her life of freedom with characteristic élan. Within a couple of days of being away from Brigitta's household, Lucy has found for herself a profession—that of a washerwoman...As she strikes the wet clothes against the stone, she keeps time, "Ishkaa....ishkaa...." The reader's heart throbs with pity and compassion for the hapless Lucy, and feels

proud about the bold girl who faces hard life like she used to face Brigitta's stick and the headmaster's cane.

Sara Joseph's use of the intimate colloquial language of the people on the margins who live in the suburbs of Thrissur town in her novels, is a means of resistance she offers against homogenization and globalisation of the word. In her Sahitya Akademi award-acceptance speech, she specifically stated: "We can resist the hegemony of the forces of globalisation only through a resurrection of our local identities. This needs a new aesthetics that takes in its language, beauty and ethics from the lives of the marginalized."

Sara Joseph, one of the leading founders of Maanushi, the premier women's organization that caught national attention in the last decades of the last century, in an extensive interview in *Just Between Us: Women Speak About Their Writing* published by Women Unlimited, Delhi, with Women's World India, and Asmita Resource Centre, Hyderabad, spells out her life's experiences and what she is up to.

Apart from Sahitya Akademi Award, she is the recipient of Cherukadu Award, Arangu Award (Abudhabi), Katha Award, New Delhi(3 times) Kerala Govt. Award for Best Story for Telefilm, for *Nilavu Ariyumu* and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award.

Maattaatthi (Malayalam novel) by Sara Joseph, 2003, Kottayam, DC Books, Pp.215, Rs.100/-

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A Reverential Dedication : Tamil Anban's *Vanakkam Valluva*

S. Gopalie

The book of poems is a reverential dedication to the immortal Tamil poet Tiruvalluvar. Done by a living poet who has carved out a niche for himself in the past few decades by ushering in new forms with newer outlook on society in Tamil poetry. Perhaps, he is the first to introduce Cin Ryu, Haiku and other East Asian forms to Tamil poetry. And whatever may be the subsequent new forms, or evolutions in the world of poetry you will find him working out on them. He is Tamil Anban (A friend, a lover of Tamil).

The book, a collection of a little more than twenty poems, can be called meditations on the poet Tiruvalluvar and *Tirukkural*. Tamil Anban does not see Tiruvalluvar and *Tirukkural* as two entities. For him both are bound together like Siamese twins. A rare literary mirror that reflects two images at the same time. *Tirukkural* can be called the ethical and moral code in Tamil. For the Tamils and for the entire humanity as such.

Tamil Anban refuses to be chained by conservative cannons of Tamil poetry. Having been a Tamil Professor for several years he knows what he is doing. And, why he is doing it. And, doing it right. Much that he respects Classical Tamil, he felt somewhere in his bones that he must seek new, contemporary forms in presenting classical works. The epics, in particular.

A different type of tribute was paid by the Tamil stalwart Dravida Kavi Mani V. Muthuswamy Iyer. That was years ago. He selected some couplets from *Tirukkural*, retained the first line and substituted the second line with his. With no damage to the original,

rather enriching it. A literary calisthenics. Not a grammatical point missed, or out of place.

And, now *Vanakkam Valluva*. In simple translation, obeisance to Valluva. While there is a plethora of commentaries on *Tirukkural* from Parimel Azhagar, Manakudavar, Kalingar, Parithiar, Pariperumal to Rajaji to K.V. Jagannathan to M. Karunanidhi, Tamil Anban firmly, sternly refuses to see the content, the beauty of Kural through the prism of the commentators' knowledge, scholarship and experience. He wants to experience it directly as he fears subjective elements might have forced their ways in the work and distorted the true import of Kural. Seeing the scaffolding and missing the building. In fact, he makes no bones about it in his poems in this collection. In the maze of verbal jugglery, he feels he may be lost. After a pause, as if he had a Sato he declares there is resplendent hue around the Valluvar's principal root of wisdom.

Out of 1330 couplets he has chosen only a few to dilate upon. To expatiate, and to pay tribute. He is not bound to give logic or reasons for his selection. But then, it is distinct in itself.

Designed initially as a serial contribution to the literary monthly *Valluvam* and later to *Muththaram* these are poetic outpourings. It must be made clear right here that Tamil Anban does not pretend that he is offering yet another commentary, thereby throwing light on Valluvar's genius and Kural's immortality. These are devoutly felt tributes from a living poet to the architect of Tamil couplets, Tiruvalluvar.

In this collection there is a little more than twenty poems. Tamil Anban's points of view are rather rare as they are compelling. In one poem itself, the reader will discover lies buried more than a Kural and copious allusions to classical works in Tamil. He talks in great reverence about the structure. While Valluvar has eight beats to compose a couplet he did it quite amazingly in just seven and left the eighth one free. And all that can be said on that subject was said leaving no doubt. In his tribute, Tamil Anban imagines the left out eighth beats making a march to Valluvar demanding to know why they were left out. And on the opening couplets of *Tirukkural*, he heralds Tiruvalluvar for making the opening letter as a simile. Not may have seen this aspect. Quite possible Valluvar showed grammar where to get off. Ironically, this tribute comes from Tamil Anban who discarded *Yappu* as shackles.

Tamil Anban draws upon an arsenal of imagery that Valluvar resorted to and added a lot more of contemporary ones to make his poem stay in the minds of the reader. Interestingly, he uses imageries

like demonstrations, political marches, hunger strikes. That is the way he relates the past to the present. Thus, in one of the poems, he portrays a bunch of sex workers taking out a march, a procession to Valluvar's abode to ask for explanations.

While he has not consciously made a selection of kural, he has taken a handful of pearls and diamonds from the ocean-bed of Kural. His longing to merge with Valluvar and taste Kural in all its purity is seen in one of his tributes. In his great fervour the poet goes so far as to say that Valluvar has supplanted the people even as he dismissed, deposed the kings. Valluvar felt that power was with the people. And in the rule of law. Not in the faith in divine rights.

Tamil Anban in his own unique style gives the essence, the *summum bonum* of Kural and Valluvar. His message is love. Spontaneous love for all. Without reservations. In another place he states that Valluvar liberated gods from the prison of temples and the minds of superstitious. His phrases like burying the city in the streets, burning light in lamps are highly evocative. He avers that the real essence of *Tirukkural* lies beyond words. After all, words are just words. And nothing more. That is why he pines to meet Tiruvalluvar and merge with him to let him discover himself. Valluvar as a moral lever.

He indulges in fantasies like Valluvar playing the musical instrument, *Veena*. Quite cleverly he has avoided mentioning what song was he playing! Valluvar's music is nothing but love. He leaps into imagination to the day when Valluvar wrote his final couplet. And dreams of getting into the dreams of Valluvar. Now, the tributes pause.

He brings in a sequence where Valluvar dismisses the friendship of the illiterate. Anban argues that the illiterates are without guile and therefore one can make better friendship with them. Was Tiruvalluvar then a racist to allow to make friendship only with the educated? Tamil Anban persuades Valluvar to allow to make friendship with the illiterates as well.

Valluvar took to the mode of questions and answers in writing his couplets. Tamil Anban true to his master and mentor follows the pattern. The where, why, when, what and how of everything. He questions Valluvar what joy can there be for the poor in parading them before a person of means to let him have the pleasure of giving alms. Tamil Anban uses a gestalt. What joy do the poor get? In making his point Tamil Anban makes an exhaustive list of those who showed compassion voluntarily and spontaneously.

Tamil Anban holds a brief for the sex workers. He makes them march to Valluvar's abode and ask him how Valluvar could dismiss

their life and so damagingly at that? Who makes a woman prostitute? The sex workers assure Valluvar that their souls are pure as much as their bodies are tainted. After all Valluvar knew his time and moral mores only too well. Quite interestingly, Tamil Anban does not ask these questions. Incidentally, this particular issue raised a storm and there were demands that the poet must withdraw it. This is clear Tamil male chauvanism. And plain Tamil hypocrisy.

Tamil Anban shows Tiruvalluvar in a sad mood, because his poems are read but little practised.

Vanakkam Valluva is an admirable work. Probably first literary venture to pay tributes to another revered classical poet in terms of poetry. Tamil Anban's poetic gifts are seen in great depth and detail. It is written in simplest Tamil, so that any lay reader can know the import of Kural. Tamil Anban has created a new genre in Tamil Poetry. A stunning literary effort!

Vanakkam Valluva by Tamil Anban, Poompuhar Pathippagam, Chennai, Pp.190, Rs.175/-

S. Gopale (K.S. Narayanaswami) is a free-lance writer-director for television and film and a literary critic of repute.

Book News

Param Vir: Our Heroes in Battle
by *Maj. Gen. Ian Cardozo*
Roli Books, New Delhi
Price: Rs. 295

In this remarkable book, Major General Ian Cardozo, himself a Sena Medal and AVSM awardee, has painstakingly put together this chronicle of citations of twenty Param Vir Chakra awardees in the post-Independence wars. The PVC is the most coveted award given for most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice in the face of the enemy whether on land or at sea or in the air. As many as eleven of twenty-one such awards are posthumous, which is testimony to their supreme acts of self sacrifice. The unique feature of the book is its sincerity as it traces the evolution of gallantry awards through the last two centuries in the times of the British and the heroism of the intrepid Indian troops as they fought alongside their Commonwealth counterparts in campaigns all over the world in World Wars I and II. This is a must read document for serious students of military his-

tory who treasure memories of the officers and men who went into battle with nary a concern for their safety. It is also a stunning indictment of those in Government who in the past sixty years have yet to raise a fitting National Memorial in the Nation's capital to pay a lasting tribute to the unsung soldiers.

Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Centre, in the West
Edited by *Rachel Fell McDermott & Jeffrey J. Kripal*
Motilal Banarasidass, New Delhi,
2005, Pages: 321, Price: Rs.250/-

This is a sharp and challenging book, describing the phenomenon of Kali, the most exciting and most controversial of all Hindu deities. The cross-cultural interpretation of the goddess is the most attractive feature of the book.

The volume is divided into two parts: Part I consists of the description of Kali in the texts and contexts of South Asia. Articles connected with the Sakta devotionalism, domestication of

the goddess, Tantric power of Kali, the terrific form of Kali and the Kali-Mayi myth are included in this part. In Part II of *Encountering Kali*, we find the goddess in the western settings and discourses. Kali is pictured here in colonial and post-colonial imagination. Articles on the psycho-analytic tradition of Kali, Sakti and society in contemporary post-colonial Trinidad, tracing Kali through time, space and culture and Kali, the Hindu goddess on internet are also included in this part. In the Appendix are given documentary film and video resources for teaching on Kali. Select bibliography and an index of the names add to the comprehensive value of the book.

Negotiating the Divine: Temple Religion and Temple Politics in Contemporary Urban India
By *Ursula Rao*
Manohar Publishing, 2003, Pages: 185

This book makes a powerful contribution to contemporary studies on religion, divinity and culture. The Hindu temple serves as the focus of Rao's observation and analysis and provides a platform for understanding the ways in which religion and rituals are accommodated in the urban quotidian. The study introduces the reader to the architecture, location and social structures of Hindu

temples, and how these institutions provided a sacred space for devotees to communicate with divine forces. Based on a rich ethnography, the author weaves arguments on temple politics in urban India and explore the ways in which worshippers, temple activists, priests, ascetic, beggars, political leaders and administrators get involved in a shared discourse. Towards the end, the author makes a powerful argument that the activities of believers transcend the dichotomy between the elite and the subaltern, and blurs differences between dominance and resistance. This book should attract readers across disciplines.

Identity, Hegemony and Resistance: Towards a Social History of Conversions in Orissa
by *Biswamoy Pati*
Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2003, Pages: xvii+57

In this book, Biswamoy Pati raises a serious question: how does one explain the virtual absence of Adivasis in coastal Orissa today, given Lord Jagannatha's Savara (i.e. tribal) origins and the fact that one encounters Adivasis quite frequently in the 19th century, or in the daily markets and *baats* in many small towns today? He raises this pertinent question at a time when the Hindu right has been making serious inroads in the

tribal regions. He analyses the incidents such as the *Kandhas* (a tribe who were integrated in the *varna* order and now think of themselves as Hindus) clashing with Panas (outcastes), regular attack on minority Christians, the murder of Graham Staines and tries to locate the answer to his question in the shifting material conditions and identities as well as changes in the social fabric of the state.

Simultaneously, he attempts to question the construction of some stereotypes surrounding Hinduism and other religions, which are increasingly and dangerously incorporated in approaches to history. A disturbing book.

**A History of Indian Literature
(500-1399)**

by *Sisir Kumar Das*

Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi,
Pages: 314, Price: Rs.200/-

A prequel to *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910* by the same author, the present volume deals with the first nine hundred years of the medieval period of Indian literary history. The literary scene

in India during the period presents a fantastically varied and wide spectrum of thought and expressions, here vibrant, there dull, now vigorous and natural, now sophisticated and recondite, at once sublime and crude. It is amazing both in quality and quantity, produced in many languages, some inter-related and interdependent, sharing the same tradition, some distinctly separate and stubbornly resisting any possible influence of the other. As in other periods, so in the medieval period, there is a co-existence of different literary tradition, some old, refusing to die out, some dominant and popular, and some new struggling to assert themselves.

Radically different from all existing models of literary history, *A History of Indian Literature* is an account of the literary activities of the Indian people carried through in many languages and under different social conditions. It is the story of a multilingual literature, a plurality of linguistic expressions and cultural experience and also of the remarkable unity underlying them.

Compiled by Monoleena Mishra

