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Contents

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The Karashima Omnibus: A Tribute To Noboru Karashima

(1933–2015)

By Vijaya Ramaswamy

Professor Noboru Karashima along with his friend and collaborator Professor Y. Subbarayalu has made one of the most crucial interventions in the historiography of South India, especially the Tamil country. Karashima's academic journey of South Indian history began in 1984 when he wrote *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions* and has continued through the publication of his omnibus *The Cholas to Vijayanagar* which included his second major work *Towards a New Formation* on the Nayaka period (OUP 2001). The last major book on *South Indian Society in Transition,* published in 2009, is a part of his academic trail. As Karashima put it poetically in the festschrift brought out by Kenneth R. Hall, his primary tool has been his keen hearing of the Whisperings of Inscriptions.

I shall attempt in the next few pages to present my assessment of Karashima's contributions to the study of South Indian history essentially in terms of the questions he has raised and the new trajectories of social history he has pursued on the basis of his epigraphical expertise.

In the preface to his omnibus, *History and Society in South India: The Cholas to Vijayanagar*, Karashima wrote:

'Clearly, studying history devoid of applicable theory is to set to sea without a compass, while postulating theory free of factual examination is to build a caste on quicksand. Thus, when I wrote the articles in this book, I made an effort to combine these two interrelated fundamentals in support of this conviction.'

Who owned the land? To what extent did individual and collective ownership of land exist? What was the relationship of the agrarian classes with the state and its officials, and in this context, what was the nature of land revenue? These hard core questions are tackled by the author. Instead of trying to fit centuries of agrarian dynamics into a neat theoretical model, his essays trace the changes from the late Chola to the Vijayanagar and Nayaka periods using flexible theoretical concepts. Karashima views as 'near stagnancy theory' efforts by Burton Stein and the Stein school to fit the Segmentary Model to all the historical state formations from the Chola to the Nayaka period. In his book *Towards a New Formation* he also distances himself from adherence to hard-core feudalism theory reflected in the writings of R.N. Nandi and more recently Kesavan Veluthat and Rajan Gurukkal. Moving closer to what is termed the 'integrative model' (again, the tyranny of the model!), Karashima postulates a gradual movement towards feudalization of the polity around the thirteenth century.

Karashima countered Stein's theory about the absence of private property in land by examining the inscriptions relating to Isanamangalam, a Brahmadeya or Brahmin holding and Allur which was a Vellala or Shudra landholding, both located in the lower Kaveri Valley. His evidence indicated the greater prevalence of individual holdings in the Brahmadeya amounting to around 50% of the total land and communal holdings in the Ur. Secondly, while in the Ur the landholding class was also the cultivating class (the author quotes the term '*er uludu kondu*') thus forming a single social strata, in Isanamangalam, the Brahmin landholders were quite distinct from the cultivators.

The term 'Kani' was discussed by Karashima in the agrarian context and defined as possession rather than ownership. Kani however is a riddle wrapped in an enigma since the term is a textured one. It may have been a generic term meaning different things in different contexts. To cite some examples all the following words have kani as their suffix or prefix: *ulavukani*, *nirkani*, *kanivetti* and *kaniyatchi*. Karashima was partially successful in unravelling this riddle by expanding its meaning from 'ownership' to 'right of possession'.

Karashima's essays on the nature of village communities focuses once again on the dynamics of social change. One such change is the decline in the importance of the *madhyastha*, a term which technically means 'arbitrator' but actually refers to the secretary or registrar of the village assembly. Based on statistical evidence he reaches the interesting conclusion that the decreasing tendency of the *madhyastha* and the increasing tendency of *nadalvan* taken together, indicate a certain change in the agrarian order of the time, such as the deprivation in the village assembly of its autonomy by the local chief and the emergence of a feudal system. Karashima stressed the importance of the Nadu in the process of economic production and social redistribution.

A major lacuna in Stein's 'Segmentary State Model' was his dismissal of the tax structure in medieval South India. Karashima however, dealt extensively with the whole issue of an elaborate tax machinery, tax oppression and popular protest by peasants and artisans against increasing taxes. In the fifteenth century, during the period of Devaraya II, a series of 'peasant revolts' against tax officials as well as the Brahmin and Vellala landowners took place. Karashima's essay locates these conflicts not only in terms of a feudal crisis and oppressive tax structure but also in terms of the *Idangai-Valangai* (Right-Hand-Left-Hand) paradigm. He further drew attention to the significance of the year 1429 which witnessed the majority of these revolts.

The essays in Karashima's book *South Indian Society in Transition: Ancient to Medieval* published in 2009 track transition in ownership patterns and emergence of new social groups to new social organizations like the Mahanadu and the indications of social ferment in the medieval period. He has also enriched the understanding of the Nayaka period and those young scholars who till now have been looking at *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period* (OUP, 1992) would do well to look at these essays.

While evaluating Karashima's academic contributions, one needs to highlight his essays on overseas trade which figure in his very important edited work titled *Ancient and Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean: Testimony of Inscriptions and Ceramic-sherds.* This is essentially a collaborative research project published by the Taisho University of Japan in 2002. Here Karashima looks at the presence of South Indian merchant guilds in the Indian Ocean. Karashima's book *In Search of Chinese Ceramic-sherds in South India and Sri Lanka* (Taisho University Press, 2004) is another important study in this area.

In the domain of social history, a significant contribution is 'Emergence of New *jātis* and Social Change'. Karashima asserts that *jati* formations took place during the transitional period of peninsular history which he identifies as the 13th-14th centuries. He

attributes it to the period of political instability and social disorder which characterized thirteenth century Peninsular India. To this, I would add the winds of change brought about by increasing commercial activities and economic dynamism.

An unusual essay by Karashima deals with imprecatory verses in inscriptions. To those who are acquainted with South Indian inscriptions these imprecatory lines will sound familiar such as 'killing a tawny cow on the banks of the river Ganges', or the committing of '*panchapathaka*' i.e., the five crimes regarded as heinous in the Hindu canons including the killing of Brahmins. Karashima draws our attention to the vulgarization of these imprecations during the later phase of medieval history, for example the warning in a Tiruvannamalai Inscription dated 1233 CE 'that the person who gives harm to this charity … his beard and breasts will grow.'

While the essay is excellently crafted, I would like to draw attention to what I feel is a serious lacuna—the lack of a gendered reading of these inscriptions. It is noteworthy that the languages of the inscriptions not only suggest the commodification of women but their use by men to set off scores against each other given the strongly patriarchal set-up of the times. I would particularly like to draw attention to the Chengama Inscription dated 1258 CE which records a family feud followed by the imprecation that anyone who helps the brother's sons will be 'treated lower than the pig and the dog and the nose and breasts of their wives will be cut off.' Similarly two inscriptions from Valikandapuram end with the threat that one who violates the deed will be punished by having his wife given to a Pulaiyar (Ins. No. 5) and a Panmaiyan (Ins. No. 6). One is tempted to look at the gender ramifications of such threats and imprecations, something that was beyond Karashima's ken.

It would have been a pleasure to handle another crisp, fresh from the press book by Noboru Karashima on newer and hitherto unexplored aspects of South Indian history. But that alas is not to be. Karashima passed away at the ripe old age of 82. However, he has left us a legacy that is timeless, in his many students, some of whom like Mizushima have directly studied under him and others like me who have drawn inspiration from him. This brief essay is my humble tribute to a great historian and a generous scholar.

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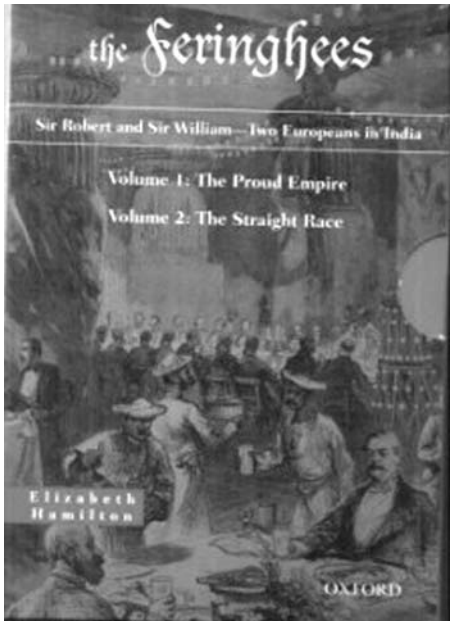
Rethinking The Feringhees In India

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

THE FERINGHEES: SIR ROBERT AND SIR WILLIAM: TWO EUROPEANS IN INDIA VOLS. I AND II
By Elizabath Hamilton
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 245+258, ₹1695.00



When one reflects on the representation of the human condition in history and one turns to the British individuals who served the Indian Empire, one is reminded of John Locke's paradox. In 1690 in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke proposed the paradox over which philosophers have puzzled since then. Let us imagine an individual who chooses to stay in a room which is locked from outside. He exercises his free will in that he chooses to stay in the room, on the other hand he actually has no freedom to leave the locked room. Is he morally responsible for the choice he made to stay in the room if he has no alternative since he is actually locked in? It is possible to elaborate on that puzzle, but for the present it is enough to remind ourselves of the questions it gives rise to when we look at the implications of the narrative in the book *The Feringhees*.

There were men like George Orwell who served the Empire and hated it, men like E.M. Forster who felt little or no sympathy with those who served the Empire—and then there were others who chose that life—they had a moral discomfort with racism and jingoism and the occasional bloody-mindedness of the conquerors, but at the same time they were locked in a trajectory pre-determined by their family and their entire social world and hence they served the Indian Empire. This book with its simple narrative of two men who served in the Indian Civil Service in the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may lead a reader to reflect on the complex issues raised by John Locke's philosophical puzzle.

The eighteenth century tradition of regarding biographies as the best form of historical writing is not dead. Arguably, it is alive in popular historical writings. Biography remains an approach to history that takes us to some of the innermost recesses of history which the generalized aggregative view of history cannot reach. This book, *The Feringhees*, is something in between those two genres. The author, Elizabeth (nee Barton) Hamilton focuses her narrative on the life of her father Sir William Barton, and her husband's great-grandfather Sir Robert Hamilton of the Indian Civil Service. Robert's father too was in the East India Company's Civil Service and Robert spent his childhood in Beneras and Bhagalpur, until he was packed off to get his schooling in England at Haileybury. He came back to India in 1820 as a young civil servant—to serve first in Beneras where his father had also worked, and towards the end of his career he distinguished himself in the 'Mutiny' of 1857. The other personality in focus in this book is William Barton who joined the ICS in 1898 and was selected to serve in the Political Service in the North Western Frontier Province (in present-day Pakistan) and eventually as the British Resident in the Princely States of Hyderabad and Mysore. His brother was an officer in the Indian Army, two of his sisters married members of the ICS, and so forth. Elizabeth Hamilton weaves together the personal history of these two pillars of the Indian empire, Sir Robert Hamilton and Sir William Barton, to open a window into the world of the builders and keepers of the Empire. In doing so she has skillfully deployed the letters written by them, family memoirs, private papers preserved by connected families like the Shakespears, the diary of Mrs. Barton, the contemporary memoirs, and some public records, to project the biographical narratives on the more wide-ranging view of the history of British India.

Why do I say that the biographical approach reaches corners of history otherwise

unreachable? Look at these nuggets from the past: 'It was said to be every mother's ambition to marry her daughters off to men of the Civil Service, that elite band somewhat sarcastically called the "Heaven Borns" by those who were outside it…. Life was certainly very different for my mother [after she married William Barton of the ICS] when she returned to Peshawar after the honeymoon. She had crossed the line from the military cantonment to a grander bungalow in the civil quarters and had climbed a good many places up in the order of precedence. Although she was not a person to attach undue importance to such things, she did tell me that she experienced some quiet amusement at seeing the faces of ladies who had previously been way above her in the hierarchy as they watched her sweeping in to dinner on an important arm, well in advance of themselves' (Vol. II, p. 39).

Or of the visit of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, to Lady Barton's home in Hyderabad: 'Trouble loomed when sixty guests assembled for the Residency dance…. The guests, the officials and their wives, were lined up in strict order of precedence, ready for the great moment when they would be introduced to the royal visitor. But the minutes ticked by and the prince did not appear. After what seemed an eternity the private secretary appeared with a worried look on his face and took my father aside, explaining that nothing would persuade the prince to leave his room. Apparently, he had reached saturation point with all the formal occasions and was staging his own *hartal,* dancing moodily around to the sound of a gramophone and thinking of Mrs Dudley Ward, the lady friend he had unwillingly left behind in London' (Vol. II, p. 94).

Or again, of Sir Robert Hamilton in the battle of Jhansi in 1857: 'He himself decided not to press on after the troops who were by this time fighting their way into the palace under heavy fire from the Rani's bodyguard who, as well as firing from the windows, were attacking with swords and bayonets any soldiers who entered the building. Instead, he went back to his tent because, he wrote to his daughter, "I thought you would not like to hear I was hit in a narrow street by a fellow from a window! And I know Aunty would have scolded me roundly—a matter between you and I, I dread more than rebel balls"' (Vol. I, p. 190).

However, there is more than a string of anecdotes, telling as they are, in Elizabeth Hamilton agenda statement in the Introduction. She wonders 'how I could reconcile the all-too-prevalent picture people have today of British men in the ICS as arrogant, racist oppressors, with the memories of my father, a man who talked so fondly of the country and of the Indians he had worked with and served. His retired ICS friends seemed to me to be cast in the same mould…. The tradition of denigrating the achievements of the British administrators in India has persisted in our own times and all too often they are depicted as jack booted imperialists….' (Vol. I, pp. 10–11).

The author's basic question is: Was not there a different kind of administrator among the British? 'My father was among those who believed that elected government could be introduced gradually with the eventual aim of handing over power to a parliament formed on the British model. He saw the Montagu Report as a laudable first stage in the process and openly expressed his support for the minority groups, including the Muslims' (Vol. I, p. 32). As a Political Service officer he spent his career in the North Western Provinces and the Princely States of Hyderabad and Mysore—and thus he was away from the main scene of nationalist agitation. But there were issues within the Princely States which, Barton decided, needed intervention in the interest of the subjects. One well-known example was Hyderabad where the Nizam's notorious acquisitiveness and habit of robbing state funds to add to his personal treasury knew no limits. When Barton was Resident of Hyderabad he tried to control illegal exactions and misuse of state funds. His attempt did not find favour with Viceroy Irwin. In the last few years of British rule in India the Princes obtained favourable treatment from a government besieged by the nationalist movement. Irwin and his government preferred a policy of minimum interference in the Princes' affairs and Barton was asked to lay off. Undeterred Barton bypassed the Viceroy and wrote directly to Secretary of State, Birkenhead. As proposed by Barton officers of the ICS took over control of the Revenue and Police Departments, much to the annoyance of the Nizam. It was a small victory for Barton. 'It was significant that by now the British were talking about Indians, rather than "natives". As a result of the British achievement in uniting the whole subcontinent under one authority, it was easy to see the people as citizens of a single nation that would eventually become self-governing. My father was among those who believed that the time would come in the foreseeable future when the Indians would be ready to take over the government for themselves. He would have approved of the Morley-Minto reforms which, before the Great War, had gone so far as to provide some representation for Indians on the Provincial Legislative Councils. This had at least given them a voice even if they still did not wield any power. As my father put it, the object was to make the Councils "responsive but not responsible"' (Vol. II, p. 42).

To the generation who served in the ICS in the nineteenth century the issue was slightly different and they also seemed to enjoy in the East India Company administration somewhat greater freedom to express their opinion. Sir Robert Hamilton as the British Resident at Indore took under his wings Prince Tukoji Rao Holkar, a child under the care of his mother Ma Sahiba, the regent, and his protégé was grateful to Hamilton the rest of his life. In fact Hamilton incurred the displeasure of his superiors for being too friendly with the native Prince. Hamilton's sympathy with Holkar was well-known and in 1857 Sir Hugh Rose, Major General commanding the central Indian theatre of War, suspected Robert of complicity with Holkar—basically, when the time came to punish the mutineers, Hamilton did not hang as many native sepoys as Sir Hugh desired. Sir Robert's colleague and rival Sir Henry Durand in fact accused Robert of illicit relationship with the young Prince, having observed 'un-British displays of affection' and an 'unnatural relationship' between Robert and Holkar (Vol. I, p. 144).

Again Hamilton was out of line with Lord Dalhousie's plan to annex the kingdom of Jhansi. The author has much evidence to show that Hamilton and British officers serving in the locality were unhappy with the decision to annex Jhansi; the most prominent of these dissenters was the Resident there, one Major Ellis, and when Calcutta got to know that he was against annexation he was transferred and demoted to a position with lesser salary. Hamilton in turn, having expressed open admiration for the Rani of Jhansi, was humiliated by his authorities and Jhansi was removed from his jurisdiction. On the whole it appears from Elizabeth Hamilton's evidence that under the East India Company the officers enjoyed some measure of freedom in expressing their opinion and some of them tried to moderate the prescription of massacre of the rebels which blood-thirsty victors wanted after the defeat of the rebel sepoys. Probably Sir Robert Hamilton himself was able to escape punishment for deviation from official opinion under Lord Dalhousie for two reasons: Lord Canning who became the Viceroy was also one of the 'moderates' and, secondly, Hamilton belonged to an old English family and Robert succeeded to the Baronetcy about the time the sepoy uprising occurred.

Elizabeth Hamilton's account also opens the question: Were not there unspoken bonds between women across the racial divide? Her opinion is that '[t]hroughout the years, there was always a rapport between the European and Oriental women.' The dowager Maharani of Mysore, when Sir William was Resident, was always behind the *purdah*, so that the dentist had to pull out her teeth through a hole in the curtain (Vol. II, p. 80), but she was a formidable lady well-regarded by the *memsahibs* she sometimes met. The author's mother was appalled when 'she heard the word "wogs" being used for the first time' at her own dinner table at the Residency Hyderabad and she thought that this was typical of young men who, unlike her husband's generation, 'were going out to India without being well-enough tutored in the need for *izzat*.... My parents insisted that they were rare in ICS circles, and any suggestion of what we would now call "racism" was very much frowned upon' (Vol. I, p. 25). And here is an interesting anecdote: 'When we took my mother to see a stage version of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, she seemed upset and was very silent when we came out of the theatre. Eventually she said, "We weren't a bit like that." She was not alone in disliking the picture painted by Forster. I was told that when my uncle, Sir Steuart Pears, found Aunt May sitting in a deck chair reading the book when they were returning to India from leave in England, he snatched it from her and threw it into the sea' (Vol. I, p. 11). There is a good deal of evidence elsewhere as well that women showed relatively more freedom to cut across the boundary between the races and perhaps this was because they were not part of the state machinery to which members of the ICS belonged.

The colonial state was no doubt a machine with a collective will but perhaps it is necessary to recognize the fact that the servants of the Empire did not constitute a monolithic entity. This becomes clear when one looks at the individuals in biographies and first person narratives. The heroes of the present work Sir Robert and Sir William belonged to the Political Service, a distant ancestor of what is now the Indian Foreign Service. In that area there were intergenerational changes and new ways of thinking and new styles of handling the job in the civil service. Sir Robert Hamilton, an old fashioned civil servant with large human sympathies, put it down in his own fashion in a letter to Sir William Kaye: he regarded with horror the increasing mechanization of the relationship between the British and the protected princes, and believed that it was mainly 'the fault of our young civilians and Military Officers who are apt to *jo-hokum* and *samja* (giving orders and expecting to be obeyed).' On the one hand, from Wellesley through Dalhousie to Curzon there was a policy trend in the colonial state machinery and it will be silly to forget that. On the other hand, there were those changes in outlook over time as well as the constant element of the expression of human individuality in differing casts of mind.

The Bartons and the Hamiltons in the book under review represent generations of Indian civil servant families. Their family histories, their lives and deaths, are imbricated in the history of the Indian Empire. There is a valuable genre of historical writing that bridges biography and history—in recent decades, from Philip Woodruff (*The Men Who Ruled India*) to William Dalrymple in our days, there are excellent practitioners of this art of writing history. Elizabeth Hamilton in the present work makes an insightful contribution to that branch of Anglo-Indian literature. And yet, if you look at the academic evaluation of these writings by professional historians, you will see that they have been scarcely noticed. I recall that even in the 1970s they were appreciated—at least in the footnotes of British histories of India, or in the after dinner senior common room conservation of a Hailey or a Hamilton or a Durand in Oxbridge colleges. But this appreciation faded away in recent years. In the *Oxford History of Historical Writing,* in five volumes in 2011, edited by Daniel Woolf and others, the complete occlusion in respect of this genre of imperial history in that global survey is conspicuous. Why is that considered irrelevant by very competent historians who contributed to these volumes? Arguably, that class of historical writing is considered irrelevant by academic historians because the individual human being has been forgotten, nor do we remember John Locke's question about the individual's moral responsibility in the paradox of 'the man in a locked room'. Perhaps we need to return to the individual in history and that philosophical question.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya taught at Jawaharlal Nehru University and was Chairman, Indian Council of Historical Research, 2007–2011. He is currently President, Institute for Development Studies, Kolkata. His recent publications are: *The Colonial State: Theory and Practice* (Primus, 2016); *The Defining Moments in Bengal, 1920–1947* (OUP, 2014); *Talking Back: The Idea of Civilization in the Indian Nationalist Discourse* (OUP, 2011); *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (Penguin/Viking, 2011).

Asian Origins Of Enlightenment Thought

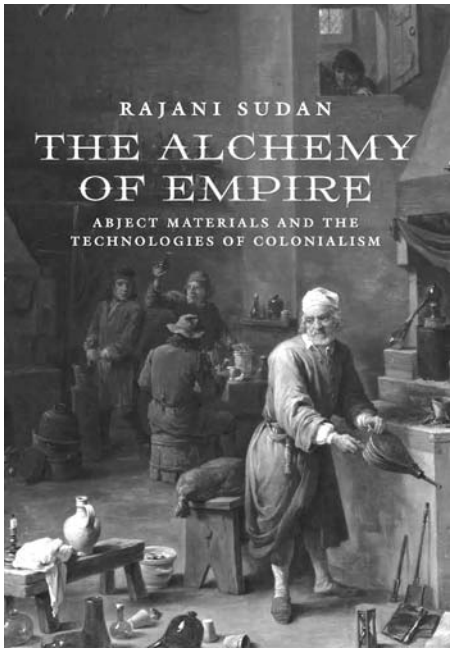
Shivangini Tandon

THE ALCHEMY OF EMPIRE: ABJECT MATERIALS AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF COLONIALISM
By Rajani Sudan
Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 223, ₹925.00

We generally identify modernity with westernization, and in identifying the forces that caused it, attribute to the modern West an almost exclusive agency. In the emergence of global modernity, we often treat the Asian world—the oriental—as a passive object, a hapless victim or, an unwitting beneficiary of the initiatives and drives emerging from the modern western world. Of course, the origins of these arguments go back to the Whig historiography, and Utilitarian thought, but even the more mature, politically sensitive strands in historical writing have often served to support them. Indeed, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the most well-known case in point; arguing that the modern forms of knowledge were a product of European post-enlightenment epistemic system, and was tied to the project of imperial domination, he denies agency to the colonized peoples in the articulation of modernity. The position is now increasingly contested, and in an effective rejoinder to the work of Gyan Prakash,[1] among others, David Washbrook and Rosalind O'Hanlon argue that modern European knowledge was not passively imbibed by the colonized subjects, but they creatively interacted with modern western thought to produce authentic, and organic categories of knowledge and forms of historical experience.[2]

In seeking to restore the agency of the colonized subjects to the shaping of global modernity, it is indeed the work of C.A. Bayly that is of immense significance. Arguing that global modernity is mutually constitutive, he has pointed out that just as much as the western imperial forces influenced the Asian world, the western world was similarly influenced by the Asian knowl-

[1] Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[2] David Washbrook and Rosalind O' Hanlon, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 34, 1 (1992), pp. 141–67.



edge and communication systems in return.[3] The argument is taken forward in a number of empirically rich and theoretically nuanced studies by South Asian historians, in particular Sanjay Subrahmanyam, that seek to develop a framework of comparative and connected histories between the Asian and European cultural and intellectual exchanges and cross-overs.

The book under review is firmly situated within this line of enquiry. Rajani Sudan re-examines the Enlightenment project, and persuasively builds the case for its non-European origins. Focusing on the representation of India in English writings, she argues that the Enlightenment science was rooted in South Asian technology and forms of knowledge. Summing up her thesis, she says: 'My method adds literary as well as archival documentation, but my thesis suggests that some of the "classical" Enlightenment scientific knowledge is not European in origin but emerges from a wider circulation. British science in particular was shaped by its relation with Indian technology' (p. 5).

In making the argument, Rajani Sudan reveals how categories of thought and worldviews emerging from India were taken over by the English and reworked to fuel the Enlightenment project. Here she makes two very interesting suggestions. Firstly, that it was not just the movement of ideas and thought processes between India and Britain that inspired the project of empire building, and European enlightenment, but the relationship between material objects and their social and semiotic power that did so! She succinctly brings out the relations between the mundane objects and technological devices that the English Company officials noticed in India, and the development of categories of knowledge and scientific thought in modern Europe. She deploys the trope of alchemy here to suggest the multiplicity of cognitive possibilities and transformative potential that the most mundane of objects—mortar, mud, ice, paper, etc., — that the English found in India, had for the sustenance of the Englightenment modernity.

Secondly, she successfully brings out a representational shift, in terms of the European perception of Indian objects, technologies and knowledge and skills. During the Enlightenment period, India was seen as a Pandora's box of wonders, but by the 19th century, it had come to be dubbed as a culturally and technologically backward site in the 19th century till the present times. Its relevance for the project of modernity was now nonexistent; if anything, it was now the modern West that had to be followed by India.

Sudan refers to the observations of the British East India Company officials regarding the development and use of mundane or abject materials like mortar, plaster, ice, surgical glue, cloth, paper that they encountered in India. These substances played an important role in the construction of an imperial ideology, and more importantly, the semiotic excess that they generated in Europe served the Enlightenment project. As she puts it: 'Mortar wasn't simply the sum of its parts but became a technology of building a city that later represented the British Empire' (p. 7) and similarly 'paper was embedded with the marks of Indian intellectual labor' (p. 7). Even as these material technologies might have been processed further by the West, the emergence of European enlightenment was not just a product of the western forms of knowledge, but was crucially influenced by the Asian world of objects, experiences and epistemic systems.

The view that there was technological stagnation in India before colonialism has been contested by several historians, and one could, in particular, cite the works of Irfan Habib, Deepak Kumar and A.J. Qaisar here.[4] These historians have convincingly shown that in the pre-colonial period, India witnessed several technological advancements in the field of agriculture, military, crafts and paper. It therefore does seem probable that many of the significant developments in the field of manufacturing technology in Europe were borrowed from the Asian world. Innovations in paper technology, for example, originated in China and several developments in paper manufacture probably reached Europe from India. Seema Alavi has suggested that the oft-held belief that the modern western medical tradition implanted itself in South Asia appears simplistic. In fact, argues Alavi, that many of the important developments in western medicine were crucially influenced by the indigenous medical traditions in South Asia.[5]

Sudan's work challenges the macro-narrative of European exceptionalism by using excerpts from the works written by East India Company officials stationed in India; some of them wrote about the Indian techniques of production with awe and admiration, and sometimes even inspired a rhetoric charged with enthusiastic comparisons to England. Other Company officials mention a deep sense of socio-cultural resistance to Indian manufactured goods and techniques in England. One could, for instance, refer to Robert Coult's description of the wondrous method of smallpox inoculation practiced by Bengali Brahmins in Calcutta, at least two centuries before Edward Jenner established smallpox vaccination as a wholly English medical practice. Similarly, Sudan mentions Sir Robert Barker's account of the production of ice in the pools or cisterns or in any waters collected on the roads, undertaken in Allahabad, Mootegil, and Calcutta, unheard of in England. This not only made the British officials marvel at this uniquely Indian technique but also made the Indian summers bearable for the European visitors.

Rajani Sudan in *The Alchemy of Empire* presents an insightful understanding of the non-European origins of Enlightenment science. This is indeed a work of immense significance, one that prompts us to take a fresh look at the forces shaping global modernity. The real value of the work lies in the emphasis it accords to the complex interchanges between mundane objects, routine technologies and the creation of new frameworks of knowledge cutting across the imperial/colonial divide.

[3] C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Also see C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (UK: Wiley, Blackwell, 2004).

[4] Irfan Habib, 'The Technology and Economy of Mughal India', *Indian Economic and Social History of the Orient,* 17, 1 (1980), 1–34; Irfan Habib, *Technology in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Tulika Publications, 2008); Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj: A Study of British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[5] Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600–1900* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

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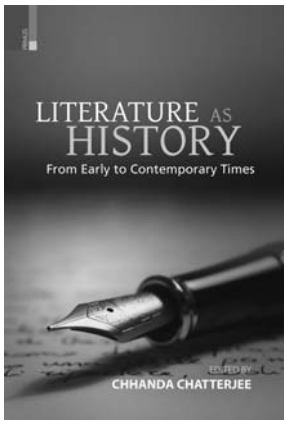
Reading Literature To Understand History

Kanad Sinha



LITERATURE AS HISTORY: FROM EARLY TO CONTEMPORARY TIMES
Edited by Chhanda Chatterjee
Primus, Delhi, 2014, pp. x+176, ₹595.00

A title like *Literature as History: From Early to Contemporary Times* promises a lot. Even if we assume that the context is Indian and not global, the various methodological possibilities of engagement between literature and history, as well as the vast range of the proposed timeframe would definitely raise the curiosity of a reader. However, the reader is likely to be disappointed by what s/he will find in the volume Chhanda Chatterjee has edited. For instance, the title opens up various ways through which the volume can be approached. Is it going to tell us how literature can serve as a source of history or how literature itself can be read as historical document in its own right or how history writing is actually a branch of literature or how we can study the history of literature as a component of the historical mainstream? The volume does not provide a clear answer to these questions, and the methodological standpoint of the book remains extremely vague.

In the Preface, Chatterjee writes, 'this is a book which hopes to illustrate that the literature of a particular period of time can also be read to understand its history' which indicates that there is an intention to study the literary text as historical. However, in the 'Introduction', she criticizes the colonial legacy in Positivist historiography, and points out that the true purpose of literature is its ability to mirror society. Hence, she refers to Ashin Dasgupta's view that while journalists and historians can merely narrate an event, literature reserves the right to enter into the heart of an event. Does it, then, mean that the volume would try to focus on the importance of literature as a source of history? At least the first essay in the volume by Ganapathy Subbiah indicates so. Pointing out the relatively less attention paid to literature in the study of ancient Indian history, while privileging the epigraphic records, Subbiah discusses the classical Tamil text, the *Pattupāṭṭu*, thoroughly to demonstrate how it can be an invaluable source for studying the voices of these poets who sang the achievements of ten heroes/kings of the Cera family, and also notes a different historical voice in the *patikam*—the biographical details of the poet and the patron—added by later authors.

Subbiah's article is an interesting one. However, the fact that literature can be a valuable source of history has been acknowledged worldwide. In fact, the commonplace distinction between the historical and the pre/historic is made on the basis of the availability of literary sources for the formal. Therefore, the volume would not make any historiographical contribution by stating the obvious. Moreover, Subbiah's work stands apart in the volume in its approach from the others. Of course, reading history as literature is not a new tendency either, and it had its official recognition as early as in 1902 when Theodor Mommsen had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for *A History of Rome*. But, none of the essays in the volume would stand out as an example of reading the literary in the historical, just like none of the other essays would fit in Subbiah's scheme of reading 'historicality in literature.' A branch of postmodernist critique of Positivist history writing, exemplified by the likes of W.B. Gallie and Hayden White, seemingly prefer to see history writing as another kind of literary narrative. The volume, or its essays, does not take that kind of stand either.

Chatterjee's introduction claims: 'Our volume hopes to be such an exercise in literary historiography, where each paper has made use of the literature of a particular age to bring forward the mentality of that age before the historian's gaze.' Therefore, there is a possibility of reading the volume as a history of mentalities, an exercise brilliantly demonstrated by the Annales School of historians such as Georges Duby and Roger Chartier. Again, there is only one essay in the volume that would justify this claim. Anuradha Roy, in a fascinating article, demonstrates the processes of 'naturalization of the nation' and 'nationalization of nature' through literary works of nineteenth century Bengal. Pointing out how the process of authenticating the nation as an 'imagined community' (to borrow the famous phrase of Benedict Anderson) entails two sub-processes of historicizing and naturalizing the nation, Roy focuses on the relatively unexplored terrain of the latter. She shows how the parallel imaginations of Mother India and Mother Bengal in nationalist literature produced by the Bengali intellectuals involved two separate kinds of imaginative exercises, the former informed more by historical imagination (coloured by the Hindu-Aryan association of great mountains and rivers such as the Himalayas, Ganga, Yamuna and Kaveri) and the latter more by a selective romantic representation of lived experience (particularly of the natural landscape of the Bengal villages). Roy also surveyed the possible sources inspiring such imagination and the evolution of the nationalist attitude to nature over the years. This article is a case of effective handling of the tools for constructing a history of mentality, or—more appropriately—what Rajat Kanta Ray would call 'emotional history.'

For the rest of the volume, there is no common thread to string together the articles taking different trajectories. Chatterjee has mentioned the *Purana* and *kavya* traditions of early India and the influence of the historical novels of Walter Scott even on the archetypal Positivist Ranke in her introduction. Some discussion on the several literary traditions of early and medieval India, which can better be approached as historical traditions (as Romila Thapar has recently shown in *The Past Before Us*) and the alternative historical representations in historical fictions would have been invaluable for this volume. But, instead of such engagement, four out of the eight essays in a volume claiming to explore literature as history from early to contemporary times focus on Bengali literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and three of them on the single figure of Rabindranath Tagore. Of course, Chatterjee's confession that the volume grew out of a national seminar on the 'Linguistic and Literary History of India', while most of the delegates did not contribute their papers for publication and the volume became a patchwork of six essays presented in the seminar and two essays collected later, partly accounts for the inadequacy of its contents.

Tagore was of course one of the major figures who pointed out the necessity to bridge the gulf between literature and Positivistic history. However, the three essays on him do not deal much with Tagore's perception of history writing. Chatterjee herself shows how Tagore presented a critique of his contemporary capitalism in the play *Raktakarabî* (The Red Oleanders) and presented the vision of a new world which might have been influenced by the success of the

Bolshevik Revolution in the USSR. On the other hand, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta reads Tagore's *Letters From Russia* with new critical questions focussing on how Tagore's reception in the Soviet Union gradually changed from warm to cold with the gradual rise of authoritarianism after Lenin's death and with Tagore's open assessment of the Soviet system being one of excited appreciation mixed with apprehension about state repression and intolerance towards the opposing views. The two essays together represent how Tagore's literary works can be understood better with knowledge of their historical milieu, and stand testimony to a great mind which could understand and boldly address the problems associated with both capitalism and socialism. However, how these may contribute in understanding literature as history remains unclear.

Igor Grbic studies the case of Tagore as an example of the problems associated with the Occidental reception of the literature of the 'other.' He shows the sensation raised by Tagore in the West in early twentieth century, making him a literary celebrity who was the first non-western Nobel laureate in Literature, gradually waned to such an extent that the recent volumes of Oxford and Penguin Books of Quotations did not include even a single line from such a great visionary and author. Grbic thinks that the problem lies in the critical yardstick through which 'the West' evaluates the merit of the literature of the 'other' on the basis of how well they respond to the Occidocentric expectations from the 'exotic.' Hence, the West was enthusiastic about the exotic flavour of the transcendental spirituality of the *Gitanjali*, but could not cope with Tagore's thorough criticism of western civilization between the two World Wars, while the greater part of Tagore's literary production remains unread and, at times, untranslated or poorly translated. This is an interesting insight in studying the history of the reception of literary works. But the article suddenly assumes the role of a sermon pointing out the several wrongs of the West, suggesting what should be the 'right' approach in all such cases, and prophesying (without any evidence) how the presently appreciated works of the Indian authors (Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga) in English will face the same fate as Tagore's. A similar tendency is visible in Swati Ganguly's article which shows how the critical reception of literature, supposedly on aesthetic grounds alone, often follows a phallocentric yardstick set by the patriarchal society, leading to the occlusion of female writers. Hence, Ganguly points out that the critical and market forces dominating the field of translating Indian vernacular fictions into English is affected by a politics which leads to the exclusion of most female authors. The article is dominated by Ganguly's thoughts about what has gone wrong and how that can be righted, rather than by critical historical engagement.

Somdatta Mandal does a short historical survey of the evolution of Indian writing in English and points out the emergence of Indian English as an Indian language produced through the two way process of glocalization: acculturation of English into an Indian language and Englishization of the Indian vernaculars. As a result, Indian English developed its own vocabulary of 'Inglish' (or Hinglish) words which may play a major role in the ongoing process of the transformation of English from a foreign to a global language. The article itself becomes a good demonstration of the 'chutneyfication' process (as termed by Rushdie) it speaks of, by the liberal uses of words like 'mantra', 'guru' and 'bazaar.' The piece is useful from the standpoint of linguistic history or at best as a shore survey in the domain of the history of literature (and not 'literature as history').

The only essay on the medieval period in the volume, the one by Amit Dey, claims to deal with the feminine elements in Indian Sufism and Indian eclectic traditions of India with Dara Shukoh as a central figure. One can hardly make sense of what links the two sub-themes. The content discussed is nothing but a brief school text-book stuff mainly outlining the names and activities of some female figures of Indian Sufism, the eclectic inclinations of Dara Shukoh, and the continued presence of eclectic elements in later thinkers, each of which have been thoroughly discussed in better manner and over the years by several scholars including Dey himself. One need not include an article in a volume like this just to restate well-known information such as there is a tradition in Islam which is sensitive to women, some Sufi saints spoke highly of their female reltives, Dara Shukoh wanted to assert the common ground among the Hindu, Muslim and Christian traditions, or Rammohun Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had eclectic religious sentiments. Dey's article exemplifies the problem with this volume: a lack of plan and direction and the presentation of a useful basket of information without any visible logic of their appearing together.

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History: Its Make And Making

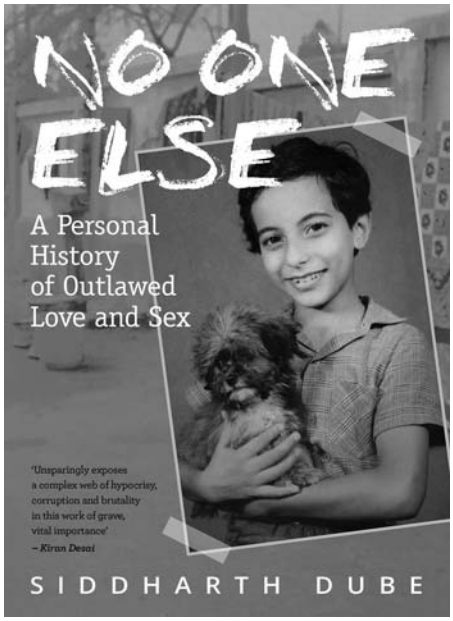
Salim Yusufji

NO ONE ELSE: A PERSONAL HISTORY OF OUTLAWED LOVE AND SEX
By Siddharth Dube
HarperCollins, 2015, pp. 371, ₹599.00

No One Else earns its title on every page, all the more for not labouring it. No one else, *but I*? The unvoiced qualifier has a case to be made for it. This is the first non-fictional account at book-length of a gay man's life in India, possibly from anywhere in South Asia, and Siddharth Dube singular also in having returned from the USA in the mid-eighties and lived openly in Delhi with his lover. (One of its pay-offs was to be a harrowing night for both at the police station; their neighbours' curtains had evidently been twitching, up and down Jorbagh.) Extraordinary personal courage could have been his principal theme, but isn't. Instead, we get a discerning treatment of an otherwise unavailable social history, which also expresses another salient quality of the writing: the low-key presence—implicit rather than overweening —that Dube maintains across long stretches of his own life's story.

Memoirs commonly set up a patchwork of recollections in which the writer's presence can fluctuate, but their ends are desultory, life shared as a hoard of anecdotes. In contrast, Dube gives us a full-blooded autobiography, tracing out the development of a coherent personhood and its bearings in the world; life shared as the honing of a perspective. Its structure is consummate, as the narrative first reasons outwards from personal experience to a worldview—its arc broadening alongside Dube's own horizons on his way to adulthood—and then, as if to test its findings, doubles back from events on the global stage to their effects on local lives and struggles.

History, taken as the sum of its effects on all-too-local lives, was the theme of his first book. *Words like Freedom* appeared in 1998, and cut through the prevailing guff about the jubilee year of Independence with a startling report card on the state. Here's what your statistics think of you, it said. While you were busy making history, here is how it was experienced by Ram Dass Pasi and his wife, Prayaga Devi, landless unlettered Dalits from UP, who can look back upon two generations of their family's life, and ahead to the lives of their grandchildren. That comprises a sufficient store of memory



and local knowledge to judge exactly what kind of government policy works, what doesn't, and why. If the state means well by them, how is it they never get asked their opinion, but only appear ground up into tables and charts? Whom does it serve that they be obscured? Might that be the state?

On the face of it, Ram Dass Pasi has little in common with Siddharth Dube, whose life as the son of a wealthy Anglophone Brahmin family in Calcutta takes him past the solid milestones of La Martiniere for Boys, the Doon School, St Stephen's College, Tufts University—marked out for privilege in a thoroughgoing way. Except that these markings are often the stigmata of privilege. Literally so, as young Siddharth is sent out each morning wearing—of all things—the yellow tie pin of Macaulay House, for the 'forbidding cathedral-like edifices' of La Martiniere, which seemed 'designed expressly to humble us children'. Even in the USA, till the mid-eighties, members of the Tufts Gay and Lesbian Community (TGLC)—a student body—were appearing anonymously in yearbook photographs, with bags pulled over their heads.

Just as the state has acquired a practised eye at overlooking Ram Dass and his kind, so these institutions of learning do not lose sleep over questions of justice and empathy. At Doon, Dube's housemaster makes a serene nightly progress through the dorms, his golden Labrador in tow, past the miserable faces of little boys into whose lives he does not care to look closely, directing genial remarks at their tormentors instead. Confronted with Dube's story of sexual abuse at the hands of a senior, his geniality turns to brusqueness: 'These things happen. You need to become tougher.' At Tufts, the TGLC's application for official recognition, 'so it could receive funding like the other student groups—kept getting rejected year after year'.

These institutions are no strangers to homosexuality. All of them originated as homosocial spaces but resolutely ignore the homo-erotism that has accompanied their ethos; silence on this subject has the dread force of a tribal taboo. In his adolescent years at Doon, Dube felt the impact of both, the traditional latitudes of a homo-normative order and the institutional stifling that warps them—indeed, can live with only their warped expression—mentally budgeting for sexual abuse, but never love, desire and pleasure. Till well into his twenties, he was to remain ill-at-ease with his body.

Like many another, he was a counter-cultural figure by default before becoming one by conviction. The grounds on which he first knew marginalization were those of masculinity. Branded as effeminate, the new boy at school—hitherto precocious—was forced into a sense of inadequacy and isolation, forced also into a false position of recoil, away from his open disposition and into a carapace of surly belligerence, expecting to be picked on at all times. This is how masculinity wins its converts, manoeuvring the world into offensive and defensive postures, provoking and thriving on a sense of insecurity, of imminent shame and crisis.

It fosters a schizoid response to the feminine—which it desires and despises, both at once. Dube had already grasped this truth in his schooldays when boys seen as effeminate were the objects of sexual advances by predatory seniors and, simultaneously, of their contempt and active persecution. Parallel to the sexual pursuit ran the construal of femininity as a temptation—corruptive of decent, clean-living boyishness – and the fear of taint by contact. In the co-ed precincts of St Stephens he was to see the 'chick charts' that played out the same resentful framing of desire as disrespect. Still later, with the outbreak of AIDS, he could easily recognize the state's impulse to vilify sex workers, the community under threat of infection becoming the threat of infection.

When AIDS first appeared in India, it was sex workers who suffered the fate reserved for gay men in the West. They were blamed for the crisis and promptly forfeited their human rights. Dube details the reflexive brutality of both state and medical establishment towards the infected. Sex workers bore the brunt of it because they are women, their profession already criminalized under law, and because their existence gives the lie to fond cultural notions of monogamous family life as India's civilizational norm.

What brings him to speak out when generations of gay men made allies of invisibility and silence? He ascribes the impulse to a 'family dharma' of honesty. Hiding away was never for him. As a schoolboy, his first submission for publication in *The Doon School Weekly* was a tragic romance between two boys—duly declined by the editors. Maverick courage came to him as a matter of course. We see him as a young journalist with the *Business Standard*, flashing his press card to protect cruising men in Delhi's parks from the predatory attentions of the police. What would have unnerved the policemen was not the press card so much as his willingness to be known precisely where their extortions traded on blowing the anonymity of their victims.

Dube is enough of a reader to recognize how books have formed him; sometimes in false starts, such as his 'quasi-Gandhian' phase. Already a vegetarian by resolve, he was inspired by Gandhi's autobiography to opt for janitorial work at Boston during the university break: something to do with the dignity of labour. In the event, his duties were not edifying but grindingly squalid, as were the conditions of work—shared by almost no white people. As a graduate student in Minneapolis his first plunge into gay nightlife saw him step out in rare finery, a vision in *khaddar*—not a success with the lumberjack clones who held sway there, although our candidate was no more in costume than they, and a bit of a clone in his own right.

Literature in its turn has drawn on Dube. Readers of *A Suitable Boy* will have no trouble identifying him as the source of Tapan Chatterji's hunted existence at the Jheel School—Vikram Seth's rendering of Doon with barely a facial mole in the way of disguise. He is also enough of a reader to have an odd way of his own with books. A childhood retreat that solaced him was into an imaginary world of 'noble animals', yet the Romantics on the literature course at St Stephens leave him cold—dismissed as 'fusty', along with Dickens. He can be just as offhand with bookish details, now attributing Phaedrus's opinions in *The Symposium* to the absent Plato, now conveying the impression that Babur enjoyed an affair with Baburi. (If Babur had any such luck his autobiography does not share the news.)

Empathy and justice are the predominant themes of the books that find favour with him. And physical distress was the calling card of much of his formative reading. So, 'my stomach turned' and 'I was stunned', 'I was jolted awake' and 'his anger shook me', are Dube's approving recollections of Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable*, Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet*, Howard

Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*. '[T]hese books about poverty, racism and subjugation of different kinds made me realize that the predicament of gay men and women was no different from that of countless other outcasts […] I discovered that we were part of an even larger community of people—oddly, even a majority of the world—who had been marginalized by mainstream society, always on bogus grounds.' This colligatory insight is what links him to Ram Dass and leads him to a solidarity with sex workers.

Immediacy of experience, rather than argumentation, gives to both *Words Like Freedom* and *No One Else* their force. Here are lives at the receiving end of history. But they represent themselves with self-possession, the dignity of intellectual and moral agents—which history denied them. The result not only vindicates the biographical form but surpasses its conventions. For biographies—whether they establish or dismantle reputations—are addressed to institutionalizing processes, the culture of iconology. Dube's task is the retrieval of lives comminuted by institutional handling. It gains in urgency today as economic rationalism reduces ever more people to redundancy and insignificance, written out of the collective future except as a drag on it, a 'concern' for institutions rather than participant in their working.

Do institutions never change their spots? Working for the World Bank in the nineties he notes several signs of promise, but equally visible at its opulent DC headquarters is a familiar smugness—nothing stinted in the way of glass, art, atriums and other statements of self-regard. The Bank lays on lavish subsidized meals at its in-house cafeterias, and flies its staff first-class on 'mission' trips, with stopovers at plush watering holes, while tirelessly preaching fiscal discipline to the world. As he points out, the term 'mission'—redolent alike of evangelistic piety and secret-service derring-do—is a giveaway of the vanity of the international development industry. He recounts trips surreal in their splendour. Meant to observe poverty in East Africa and sex work in India, these missions involve the protocol and perquisites of state summits, all at taxpayers' expense, and no more than perfunctory contact with the objects of study.

Careerism is the hardwired bit in the circuitry of institutions. Here, vanity and venality come to a mutually advantageous arrangement. The final chapters of the book are a chilling account of how a respected international body like UNAIDS buckled under pressure from the Bush administration and lent itself to the propagation of Right Wing prejudices in the fight against AIDS, jettisoning hard-won practical and humane approaches to AIDS-prevention.

In 1990, at the Harvard School of Public Health, Dube studied under Jonathan Mann, who had been instrumental in pushing for rights-based strategies in the prevention of HIV, highlighting the link between rates of infection and populations whose human rights were least fulfilled. Rather than the arsenal of coercive measures favoured by govts worldwide—compulsory testing, 'contact' tracing, quarantine, even (as in India) illegal incarceration—Mann argued for awareness and community mobilization as efficacious strategies. By the time Dube joined UNAIDS in 2005, this reorientation had been official practice for years, showing results.

Now, however, UNAIDS quickly surrendered its expertise to the Bush regime. Programmes of proven effectiveness like needle exchange and the promotion of condom use were defunded. Sex workers and their organizations became public enemies, fused with the international human trafficking industry—the target of a new 'global war'. The disbursement of funds was overseen by a coterie of Right Wing politicians, policy makers with connections to big pharma, and god-squadders, with the spending on medicine initially restricted to the formulations of American industry—billed at $15000 per person per year—over the much cheaper generic drugs developed elsewhere—$300 per year. Instead of science, abstinence and faith, along with rampant homophobia and violence against sex workers, were the new strategies of choice.

As senior adviser and speechwriter to Peter Piot, the executive director of UNAIDS, Dube saw the organization capitulate to these preposterous conditions, and the effects of this from Africa to India. Piot, co-discoverer of the Ebola virus in his twenties, and widely admired for his hard-working ways and dynamism, had the scientific and official standing to discredit the Bush regime. Instead, now into his third term in office, he accommodated the takeover of the global anti-AIDS effort and its reduction to witch-hunts. UNAIDS also shifted at this time into its very own acreage of tinted glass and high atriums in Geneva, and ran a busy line in lavishly-illustrated coffee-table volumes of triteness and self-promotion.

'No one else' is the unspoken refrain of our queer past. The phrase played on the minds of odd and lonely figures, from Baron Corvo to Quentin Crisp, who saw oddity as their true calling and grew ever lonelier in its pursuit. Henry James had had to choose between enjoying a sensual life or a social one; so, no one else was to know both together, not in his created world. Proust reversed the inequity so that, by the end of his magnum opus, virtually no one else in the beau monde—besides Marcel, our narrator—is certifiably straight. And Forster, after *A Passage to India*, could not bring himself to set another work within the heterosexist order. His later fiction—homosexual stories—stayed private for the remaining four-and-a-half decades of his life. That is how absolute the divide and sense of isolation felt.

The gay outlook is sunnier, more practical and assimilative. You come out to the world and swell the ranks of those who did so before you. Then you march for pride, for legal recognition, for civil unions and the right to start a family. There are support groups to join, and funds to be raised, role models and lions of the community in every walk of life. Siddharth Dube knows that history does not move by mechanistic incrementalism. The years that *No One Else* got written saw India's gay community de- and then re-criminalized. As if to stress the point, Professor Siras was drawn and quartered by the Aligarh Muslim University during our brief spell of dignity under law.

Today, as we watch institutions painlessly accommodate male leaders whose consciousness never registered the women's movement (among much else), we are in for a live demonstration of Dube's themes: those deep entrenchments of outlook he pointed out show up again, proof against appeal to justice or empathy. The compact of institutions, with their authorized local dealership in reason and history, is on a roll.

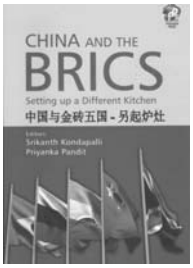
Salim Yusufji is a former school teacher currently writing a work of fiction.

Awarded

Kiran Doshi, a retired diplomat and educationist from Gujarat, won The Hindu Prize 2016 for his third major work of fiction, *Jinnah Often Came to Our House*, a book set against the political turmoil of the subcontinent from the early part of the 20th century, ending with the Partition and Independence. Doshi was among the five authors shortlisted from nearly 60 entries for the seventh edition of the prize, including Anil Menon's *Half Of What I Say*, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance,* Kunal Basu's *Kalkatta* and Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls*.

The award—a citation and a cash prize of ₹5 lakh—was given away by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks at The Hindu Lit for Life Fest in Chennai in January.

Changing Contours



T.C.A. Ranganathan

CHINA AND THE BRICS: SETTING UP A DIFFERENT KITCHEN
Edited by Srikanth Kondapalli and Priyanka Pandit
Pentagon Press, 2016, pp. 274, ₹1295.00

This book uses BRICS as reference point to examine the changing contours of China's international relationships as it grapples and comes to terms with the new imperatives posed by its internal economic growth and what this implies for the world. The book consists of 12 essays grouped into 2 sections: 'Thematic' and 'Bilateral relations' apart from a detailed introduction and 8 annexures giving tabular data/statistics to supplement the main book. Each of the essays, by a mix of Chinese and Indian scholars, are complete and self-standing and can well be read in isolation but taken together, contain considerable statistical detail and analytical perspectives to provide a masterly overview of the nuances of Chinese positioning, global governance and BRICS objectives and the movement time paths, as also considerable insight of the issues/constraints facing the constituent economies. The editors bring out that the intent of the book is to stimulate discussion about China's policies, multilateralism and approach towards global governance.

The subtitle 'Setting up a different kitchen' draws from a policy approach suggested by Mao Zedong at the origin of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949, desiring not a stop-gap arrangement of reconstruction but a comprehensive plan, distancing from past practices and ushering in new perspectives. The book's introduction states that it is important to keep this phrase in focus while evaluating Chinese foreign policy dilemmas/postures. It states that the theme's importance can be gauged by using a proxy tool, i.e., the extent of revealed domestic interest as evidenced in the time series trendlines of academic articles in Chinese universities/think tanks published 'around' this theme. It is stated that this phrase is one of the three main guiding principles of Chinese foreign policy right from 1949, along with the other two principles enunciated by Mao at the same time viz., 'clean up the house and invite the guests' and 'leaning to one side' (i.e., Soviet Union in 1949).

The reference background used to evaluate Chinese foreign policy dilemmas or 'BRICS', comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, represents one of the prominent institutional manifestations of emerging markets for asserting their interests, reform objectives and worldviews. It came into being during the global financial crisis with the focus of reducing global dependence on the US Dollar and obtaining correction of the historically inherited disparities. Several essays unveil different aspects of the origins of BRICS which can be traced to the Russia/China initiative initially termed 'Shanghai 5' and later the 'Shanghai Cooperative Organisation', the India/China/Russia trilateral dialogue mechanism, the IBSA initiative of India/Brazil/South Africa, etc.

The rise of BRICS was celebrated not because of the pre-existent inter-relationships amongst the member countries (intra BRICS trade is only 1% of world trade, with China being the main player), but because they account for 30% of world area, 42% of the world population and 23% of its GDP. Their share in world exports grew from 8% in 2000 to 19% by 2014, or over US 3 Trillion dollars in absolute terms, with USA being their main market. Their share of trade in services is lower than their share in trade of goods, with imports of USD 700 billion and exports of over USD 500 billion. China dominates in the trade of goods, whilst India scores higher in services. However, each of the BRICS constituent has its own advantage, with Brazil and South Africa being termed in common parlance as the global resource base, Russia as global energy station, India as global office and China as global manufacturing base. The combined market capitalization of Chinese and Indian stock markets rose to a record USD 6.4 trillion by end 2014. They account for 38% of global carbon emissions with China alone accounting for over 24%. India and Brazil are both below the world average. In the human development index, Russia, Brazil and China are in high HDI category with ranks of 57,79 and 91 respectively. India has the lowest HDI score among BRICS though its life expectancy is higher than that of South Africa.

The introduction and the first three thematic essays deal with China's multilateral diplomacy. The role played by the media and think tanks in institutionalizing the BRICS initiative as an effective representation of south-south cooperation, are covered in separate essays. The remaining two essays in the thematic section focus on key aspects of global governance, such as Energy and Cyber Security. The second section is on 'Bilateral relations' and consists of 5 essays(two essays, one by an Indian and the other by a Chinese scholar are on Sino-Indian relationships) focusing on China's relationships with its BRICS counterparts.

The first essay is on 'Multilateralization with Chinese Characteristics' and builds on the discussion in the introduction, to delineate the subtle differences between multilateralization evolved by groups of states, to resolve some overreaching issue globally—without bringing in sovereignty issues and state intervention—and the Chinese approach which, though rich in content and productive in addressing many issues, is constrained by the specificities of Chinese diplomatic practice. It brings out how the rigidities imposed by the three overarching principles of Chinese foreign policy were sought to be diluted by Zhou Enlai, the first premier and concurrently Foreign Minister in the early 1950s by enunciating the need for 'seeking common ground' to secure reconciliation of differences with the outside world and relationships with a diversity of other countries. This dilution was subsequently built upon when the Deng period reforms resulted in a transformation of the production capabilities/efficiencies and converted China into an international powerhouse, but heavily dependent on international trade and thus external markets. Multilateralization perforce had to be added to the three pillars to secure the new realities. The concept 'seeking common ground' came in handy. Here again time series data of academic research trends are used to depict the relative importance of the aforesaid concepts in actual Chinese foreign policy dilemmas. Normally, it is expected that when a nation joins a multilateral forum, it would allow group interests to precede bilateral and sovereignty issues. However, on issues such as Tibet, Taiwan and recent South China Sea issues, China's hard positioning generated by the three overarching principles has caused inconvenience to the multilateral institutions. Thus, even ASEAN, a forum actively joined by China in early 1990s now faces prospects of summit meetings without commonly agreed declarations. It is stated that this is a specificity of Chinese multilateral behaviour.

The second essay, 'The Changing Economic Order: Linkages and Disconnects' traces the evolution of BRICS and analyses its policy initiatives towards stabilizing the world economy in the post-crisis period, China's engagement with the group and its attempts to create an alternate to the US

dominated international institutions such as the Chiang Mai initiative and the BRICS Bank, as also the differences within BRICS.

The third essay, 'Perception and Reality in the Changing International Order' brings out the directional shift which occurred in China under Deng Xiaoping's'reform and opening up'. While China pursued a low profile foreign policy keeping in mind Deng's dictum of 'keeping a low profile and biding its time', its robust economic rise converting it to the world's largest exporter and second largest economy, led to an active desire to participate in multilateral institutions while attempting to modify the western dominated economic order by integrating with other major and emerging economies. The chapter seeks to depict China's perception of the economic order and how she perceives herself in that order, using BRICS as a reference point. The author suggests that China is not changing the existing international system but is changing its own behaviour to secure greater global multi-polarization. The chapter also contrasts China's perceptions with the reality of actual international equations, highlighting the significant gaps using BRICS as a reference point.

The fourth essay, 'The Role and Representation of Media' describes and analyses the role of media, both print and television, also films in the international arena, but again with specific focus on BRICS. The essay brings out the differing levels of 'freedom' available to the organizations/agencies within BRICS nations and the fact that China is unlikely to open this sector lest it destabilizes their domestic affairs. As in other essays, there is considerable statistical information on a variety of aspects.

The fifth essay, 'Role of Think Tanks' discusses their significant role in linking governments and the public. The first BRIC think tank meeting was held in Russia in 2008, a year prior to the first summit meeting of 2009. Each country nominated an institution to represent the country. Another important forum, the BRIC Academic forum was launched in 2009. A third forum is the BRICS Trade and Economic Research Network (BRICSTERN), launched in 2011 in Shanghai. The essay brings out that in China, BRICS affairs are mainly conducted in a 'Track 1' mode, wherein decision making operates through a top down approach, limiting the role of Chinese think tanks in policy making, but performing an advocacy role. Indian institutions are often from the non-governmental sector.

The sixth essay, 'The Energy Factor', attempts to understand the role played by BRICS countries in bringing about reforms in global energy governance. The focus is on the Oil and Coal sectors. The essay has considerable information on production/consumption and trade in these fields, to bring out the complementarities available for enhancing cooperation. The scale of difference between the size of the Chinese economy and the BRICS partners and the implications that this has for the future BRICS trajectory, are discussed. The essay also uses this sector as the reference point to examine the initial dynamics of the Shanghai based BRICS Bank or the New Development Bank, noting that despite having a democratic approach in its administrative structure, it shall mainly be collaborating with those centres that are China led or where China has the biggest say, either as a shareholder or as a political and economical influencer.

Cyber Security issues have attracted much attention following Edward Snowden's revelations as also the recent emergence of 'smart phone botnets' and 'cryptolocker ransomware' (i.e., virus programmes targeting Android/Microsoft windows). It should also be noted that recently, following USA, NATO in June 2016 has also officially declared cyber space as the fifth domain of war after land, sea, air and outer space—indicating a need for an altered view of how cyberspace/cyber arms race is perceived. As not much is known about China's stance, its concept of what constitutes cyber security and how it compares with western perceptions, the seventh essay explores these themes, as also BRICS's attitudes towards the same. It notes that in September 2015, China signed the 'Sino-US cyber deal' and is trying to portray itself as a responsible partner but also that in December 2015, at the Second World Internet Conference, President Xi Jinping stated that China with its 600 million users should have a say in drawing up global rules and these should include the right to decide what to censor and block.The essay refers to Chinese concerns at US domination over all the IT core technologies—Microsoft in operating system, Intel in central processing unit, Cisco in modems, Seagate in hard discs etc., as also its domination over root servers, domain name system(DNS), distribution of IP addresses through organizations like ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). It refers to the FBI/Pentagon's insistence that Silicon Valley's global companies should have first loyalty to American interests, whether in opening their systems to law enforcement or development of new weapons giving rise to the Chinese concern that if the main servers are turned off, the internet will be like a pipeline without water. It brings out that in Cyber warfare, China has announced 'no first use' policy musing about the resultant implication related to 'weapon development'. It brings out that the BRICS Durban 2013 declaration was the first on internet/cyber security. Later a BRICS working group on ICT cooperation was formed. Considerable information on subsequent dialogues, as also bilaterals and SCO, etc., is provided. The essay highlights that China is unlikely to relax its domestic cyber governance rules, but has concurrently softened its position on global cyber governance. It further points to the potential for cooperation and need for greater activity on the part of both BRICS and individual countries, on this new vital area of international relations.

The essays on bilateral relations explore Chinese engagements with the BRICS constituents with extensive data tables and information on bilateral engagements. The nuances of different BRICS interrelationships vis-a-vis China are well brought out. The bilateral pronouncements give credence to the existence of the constraints imposed by the three overarching principles with issues such as one China/Dalai Lama often finding a place without however a matching Chinese enthusiasm regarding the partner country's 'core' issues, as also the corresponding flexibility regarding the trade/investment deals.

China, post Deng Xiaoping's reforms, represents a unique case story, in that it effected substantial 'Real Sector' and 'Fiscal Management' reforms, including far-reaching decentralization on all attendant matters without concurrently relaxing their political and monetary sector control systems. Their growth story spectacularly rode the globalization induced boom. The turbulence resulting from the 'Global Financial Crisis' severely challenged their monetary sector management systems, as these started exacerbating the problems experienced in the real sector. The recent waywardness reported regarding their stock markets/currency behaviour are partly due to the hesitant relaxation of monetary sector control systems. Concurrently, global economic weaknesses are inducing interesting alterations in international political arrangements which look as if they will equally adversely impact the real sector stories of various nations. It may cause heightened diplomatic activity. This data-rich book focussing on international relationships will thus provide a useful source of information for officials and scholars engaging with China in a variety of fields.

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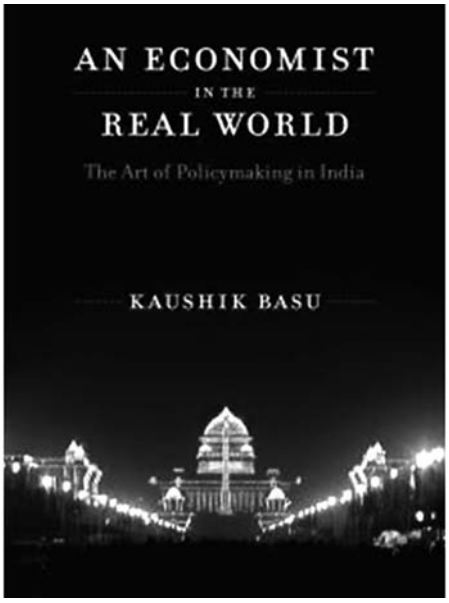
Of Untold Tales

T.C.A. Srinivasa-Raghavan

AN ECONOMIST IN THE REAL WORLD
By Kaushik Basu
Penguin/Viking, 2016, pp. 256, ₹599.00

INDIA'S LONG ROAD: THE SEARCH FOR PROSPERITY
By Vijay Joshi
Penguin-Allen Lane, 2016, pp. 421, ₹699.00



Kaushik Basu is a friend of 40 years but Vijay Joshi I do not know at all. Neither factor prevents me from saying, at the very outset, that these are not the best that these two very highly regarded economists can offer. Basu's book disappoints not because what he has written is not up to the mark but because it does not live up to the title. Even if he was bound by the Official Secrets Act, some vignettes would have added to the insights that he provides. Not that there aren't any. For example, speaking of the Finance Ministry's top officials he says how, on one occasion, they were all insisting loudly that energy subsidies be cut, forgetting that they themselves were getting government cars with full tanks and paid almost nothing for transport.

And Joshi's book disappoints because, alas, it is no more than a long ramble into what needs to be done if India is to become a reasonably prosperous country. It reads a bit like the chapter in the Economic Survey which allows Chief Economic Advisers to take wing about what all they think needs to be done. Problem is, nobody pays the blindest bit of attention. I was doubly disappointed because his earlier book on India's economy between 1951–1991 (IMD Little) is an absolute masterpiece. If that was a masterly clinical analysis of India's utterly counter-productive economic policies, this is more an emotional mumble. Or so I think.

At the core of both books lies a fundamental disability: they are both by NRIs. Joshi has been living in the UK, mostly in Oxford, for around 45 years; Basu has been living in the US, mostly at Cornell University, for almost 25 years. That is a problem because they don't have a feel for things. They are like a chef who does not enter the kitchen.

Basu did enter it for briefly for three years between 2010 and 2013 as the Chief Economic Adviser but this book, at least, doesn't reflect the heat he might have felt there. His minister was Pranab Mukherjee, who was a major power in the UPA. Basu steers clear of commenting on this remarkable man and his style of functioning. He is also silent about his senior colleagues from the IAS who tend to view the Chief Economic Adviser as the person who writes the Economic Survey.

The best chapter in the book is the one on corruption. If memory serves right, he had included it in one of the Economic Surveys he supervised as CEA and which caused foolish people to see red. His solution to extortion/corruption by government employees is to make bribe giving legal but bribe taking not. This, he shows, would lead to greater cooperation between citizens and enforcement agencies.

Basu's chapter on India's permanent political problem, inflation, is also different although he takes a purely technical view of it when this was, in my view, a great opportunity for him to have told us about the political economy of it. His main conclusion is that India should consider some new and unconventional policies for dealing with it like reducing—rather than raising—lending rates. Surprisingly for a neo-classical economist, he endorses RBI intervention in the forex market to suit the needs of exporters. Vijay Joshi also says the same thing—that India should have managed float of the rupee. The trouble is, it already does.

Joshi's book is entirely different. Like other Indians or PIOs he is also worried about what the future holds for India. There is general agreement that it will all turn out well but, says Joshi, for that to happen quickly, in say another 25 years, India will have to reform, reform, reform. Nothing less than a complete overhaul of everything will do. Government failure, economic follies like the public sector and massive subsidies and, of course, politics are the ones most in need of reforms. But so is everything else, not the least of which is agriculture which accounts for less than 20 per cent of GDP but hosts over 60 per cent of the population.

Surprisingly, he is very kind to the Modi government which, he says, has done well by macro-economic stability. Given that his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, had handed him an economy in crisis he omits to mention just how well the Modi government has done.

The dozen chapters before this assessment of the NDA government are no more than a potted history of what has been, a brief description of what is, and a soliloquy about what needs to be done. Practically any Indian economist who has been practising for the last 20 years could have written this book. There is absolutely nothing new here.

At some point in the not-too-distant future I am sure Basu and Joshi, together or separately, will get around to taking a good hard look at the paradox that India presents: a dynamic people ruled—mind, not governed—by a lazy, corrupt and self-seeking bureaucracy that manages to thwart everything and everyone, including prime ministers and chief ministers who, out of sheer frustration, turn dictatorial and make just the mistakes the bureaucrats hope they will. This has been the real unwritten story of India since 1947. What they have attempted in these books doesn't even make the first paragraph of even a newspaper article.

If they need any help, they only have to ask me.

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Accidental Prime Minister

Ajay K. Mehra

1991: HOW P.V. NARASIMHA RAO MADE HISTORY
By Sanjaya Baru
Aleph, New Delhi, pp. 216, ₹499.00

In 1991, India was compelled to move away from the Nehruvian 'Socialistic Pattern of Society' and 'mixed economy' that heavily depended on public sector enterprises to do miracles and import substitution, even though the model of planned economic development personified by the Planning Commission and the five year plans it fashioned was retained. The state in India in these 44 years of post-Independence economic development had developed an overwhelming presence on the economic scene, not only through the public sector behemoths, but also through the regulatory regime that came to be derogatorily known as

license-permit-quota-inspector *raj*. Indira Gandhi since her 1971 electoral victory, that was the culmination of her five year power struggle with the old order in the Party, transformed the Nehruvian policy framework into a giant populisms machine that her successors in the Janata Party could further complicate, but not overturn.

1971 also was the beginning of a period during which India's political surface turned brittle, hence an apparent political stability rested on fragility that destabilized electorally stable regimes. Indira Gandhi was destabilized since 1974 despite a two-thirds majority, a retrospective view of the Janata Party tells us that it was built on instability and was unlikely to last it full term, Charan Singh would not have been so naïve as to expect that the Sanjay-Indira combine would allow him to rule till 1982, Indira Gandhi's second run was marked with avoidable conflicts and was a drain on the economy, Rajiv Gandhi hardly realized that he had inherited a weak party structure from his mother and was deluded himself with a three-fourth majority that did not prevent him from being politically uncertain by 1986. The regimes since then, uptill now—coalitions and apparently majority government of Narendra Modi under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government—have been regimes with political uncertainty hanging around them. No wonder, populism remained a policy option with all the governments till the options ran out in 1991.

Sanjaya Baru has lucidly written a very readable account of the year, the era and the man (P.V. Narasimha Rao), whom he calls India's first accidental Prime Minister (p. 4), for not having been given a ticket by Rajiv Gandhi for the 1991 general election, (he was packing his bags for a return ticket to Hyderabad). However, a leaderless Congress after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination picked him to shoulder the challenge of what appeared to be a post-Nehru-Gandhi innings of India's grand old Party. Though counterfactuality is always a methodological option in social sciences, 'ifs' do not always explain possible course of events. Hence, what Rajiv Gandhi, who compelled, both by choice and with his uncertainty, resignation of the Chandrashekhar government that he created to obviate the possibility of either him heading a minority government, or anyone else from the Party as the PM acquiring a larger image over him, would have done had he or his Party had taken the reins is only a hypothetical question. But the election that witnessed an ascendant Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, made PV the universal Party choice to head the Party and the government. Incidentally, Bhabani Sen Gupta had characterized Rajiv Gandhi as 'His Accidency' in his 1989 biography of him, arguing that the accidental death of his mother brought him on the hot seat.

Though Indira Gandhi had transformed the Nehruvian socialism to populism in the name of the poor and imposed the throttling license-quota-permit-inspector *raj*, she had herself begun to ease the restrictions in her second reign. Rajiv Gandhi too was opening up the economy, but the measures were not enough. Vishwanath Pratap Singh's brief regime, dependent as it was on the paradoxical clutches of the Left Front and right oriented BJP, internal contradictions of the party and the alliance to try anything. Chandrashekhar and his Finance Minister were handling the crisis and were in the process of easing the economy, negotiating an IMF loan, when he felt compelled to resign. Baru points out Chandrashekhar's reluctance to endorse the Reserve Bank of India's nod to mortgage gold in its vault for an IMF loan, but there was little option.

Obviously, the mantle fell on PV, who had virtually retired from his political life and Dr. Manmohan Singh, his Finance Minister to execute the task no Prime Minister would like to do. The total loan raised against the pledge of gold was $405 million. However, that was just the beginning of the journey. The duo went ahead in opening up the economy, creditably using Nehru's thoughts and statements to convince the reluctant members of the party, the cabinet, the government, the satraps and so on. However, the team succeeded in both bringing the economy back on a growth track and the pledged gold.

The strength of Baru's eminently readable book is that he gives even a minute detail of the episodes that went on to make the political and economic spectacular event. Even though most sources are either secondary—newspapers, biographies, memoires, and so on—or his own notes in the positions he served, he explains complex economic concepts and events in simple readable narrative, something that would be useful even for an undergraduate student. It is a book worth reading.

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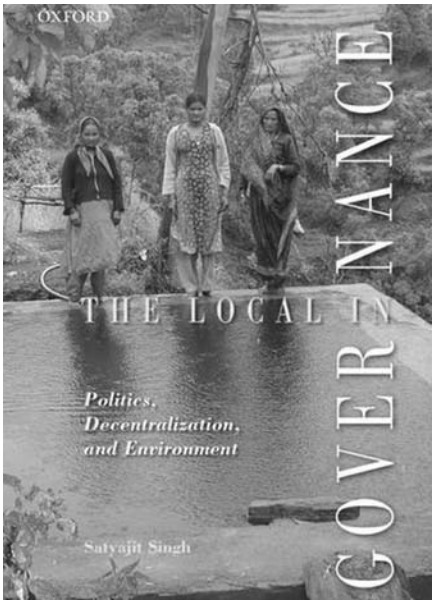
Beyond Normative, Technocratic And Economic Perspectives

Rapti Mishra

THE LOCAL IN GOVERNANCE: POLITICS, DECENTRALIZATION AND ENVIRONMENT
By Satyajit Singh
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, 2016, pp. xiv+261, ₹895.00



The work under review studies the primacy of 'politics' in the political economy of institutional design for environmental governance and its impact in shaping the institutions and outcome. The book holds that decentralization cannot be reduced to institutional arrangements for local governance, rather it should be seen as a dynamic process, highly contingent upon the larger political economy of the local, where, interplay between the state's formal institutions and informal traditional local arrangement plays a vital role in shaping its architecture. For the author 'architecture' is a useful term as it encapsulates everyday politics at the local level which could be reshaped and redesigned to meet future concerns. The author explains why there is a need for bringing in the idea of politics to understand the different architecture of decentralization, thereby giving a boost to a better policy design which would be based on processed knowledge. It explains why it has taken a sectoral route which includes the forest and water sectors. The work uses qualitative research complimented by the structured interview.

As a participant observer, the author successfully attempts to study local practices, cultural and bureaucratic behaviour (p. 29). Though inspired by various methodology, the work has significantly taken much from Ostrom's work which deals with the problem of managing 'common pool resources' (such as mountain meadows, fisheries, irrigation systems and ground water basins) by emphasising on the durable cooperative institutions, organised and governed by the resource-user themselves and also from James Scott's idea of 'infrapolitics' which highlights everyday forms of formal and informal local politics (p. 27). One important point the author emphasizes is that the outcomes of centralization should not be compared to that of a badly designed decentralization programme as in most of the cases despite the 73rd Amendment, many States (like Madhya Pradesh) chose the path of only functional decentralization while holding on to the financial and administrative functions. This means a lack of political, fiscal and administrative autonomy for decentralization programmes in most of the States. This work helps one to recognize why bad decentralization designs are implemented, why some well meaning designs are unable to deliver and why one should think of decentralization not as a one time policy exercise but as a medium to long term process.

The second chapter takes the historical route to look at decentralization of forest management of Uttarakhand, presenting a brief sketch of the region, society and economy along with the law passed for forest management (both colonial and postcolonial). Since the colonial policies favoured centralization, it alienated forest-dwellers' rights. However, later colonial governments adopted decentralization as a way out for conflict resolution. This led to the creation of *Van Panchayats* (VP). It also looks at the postcolonial policy of VP legislation passed in 1976. This legislation diluted the concession of the VP on the pretext that there is unsustainable use of natural resources by the villages, as there was hidden commercial interest of the Forest departments. This led to the *Chipko* movement in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions. This chapter goes on to argue that despite all institutional obstacles, the VPs have done well. The third chapter studies the collective pursuits and dilemmas of forest management through VPs. It focuses on the different patterns of conservation and exploitation strategies employed by the village communities along with the everyday politics of these communities pulled by their interests and needs. Manauli is the village under study. Many instances of success have been discussed where there is autonomous village regulation of resources. Failure of collective interventions has been pointed out in the cases where there are collective efforts in collaboration with the State. The reason behind it is that the State institution for the management of the VPs is not fine tuned with the needs of the locals and their indigenous institutions (p. 94). This chapter suggests a greater need for flexible rules for institutions.

In the fourth chapter a number of villages have been studied along the line of different property regimes, legal rights and tenure, nature of both formal and informal diverse institutions and its local politics. The author points out that instead of arguing in favour of a neat state, market and community based models, a combination of strategies could work wonders depending on the local needs, diversity of resources and institutions and most importantly local politics.

The fifth chapter focuses on the shifting power relations at the grassroots level. It compares the new institution of JFM and traditional institution of VP. This section argues that the JFM programme which is a 'deconcentrated' instrument of the Forest Department needs to be transformed to arrive at a more 'devolutionary' arrangement within the local government framework which is mandated in PRS, FRA and PESA. This chapter critically analyses the Joint Forest Management for overlooking the rich experience of the region with VPs' unequal participation where villages become the subordinate partner despite its successful community management based on customary practices and the limited role of NGO's. Further, the author also points out that there is lack of clarity of functions at the local level which often becomes the reason for confusion in the matter of jurisdiction, lack of insight on the part of JFM due to the absence of the revenue department leads to faulty allocation of resources. The author critically calls this as centralized decentralization leading to recentralization—an exercise in participation without the devolution of power (p. 156).

The focus of the sixth chapter is public rural water supply and the key challenges it faces after reform. The author briefly discusses two successful cases that show decentralization in rural drinking water with local and NGO's initiatives has resulted in better policy outcomes. The first case is of Olavanna in Kerala which goes back to 1987. It used Gram Panchayat as a facilitator by making its own contribution through alternative private

schemes. The second case is from Uttar Pradesh where he discusses the first institutional approach to community management known as *Swajal* Project of RWS in 1996. This chapter presents the lacunae in the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED).

The seventh chapter analyses three popular ways of decentralization in RWSS. Keeping in view the 73rd Amendment Act, the author studies three cases representing three generic models of decentralized institutional design. In Uttarakhand village user community (VWSC) is under the direct control of the State bureaucrats and exists outside the local government institution of political control. This is called the Swajal model which showed positive development in comparison to RWS of PHED. It has substantive participation and autonomy. In Tamil Nadu the water board corners the resources of sector reform programme but does not implement the spirit of reform (p. 207) The TWAD board works with the village committees but they are not accountable to the Gram Panchayat. Thus, in terms of efficiency it lacks inadequate focus. The last model discussed in the chapter is that of Kerala where the democratic devolution model ensures the institutional arrangement related to water reform within the constitutional framework of the local government by building the capacity of the lowest level linked to fiscal devolution and responsibilities assigned to them. The rural water reform project needs to be integrated with a wider water sector decentralization programme including irrigation and watershed management. The book concludes that capacity building of local government in the changing times will be measured on the basis of developmental or emancipatory output (p. 230). This initiative to critically study institutions and politics of local governance could potentially turn the slogan 'making institutions more responsive to the poor people' on its head to suggest building 'capacity of poor people to run state institutions'.

The book is an answer to the major question why institutions of local governance fail to deliver. However, it could have been more interesting if the case studies had also included insights of local politics in Maoist affected regions. The 'local' politics and institutions in such areas acquire their own meaning with the presence of a third party, which presents a major challenge to State institutions by running parallel institutions of conflict resolution and management.

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Reimagining Labour Politics

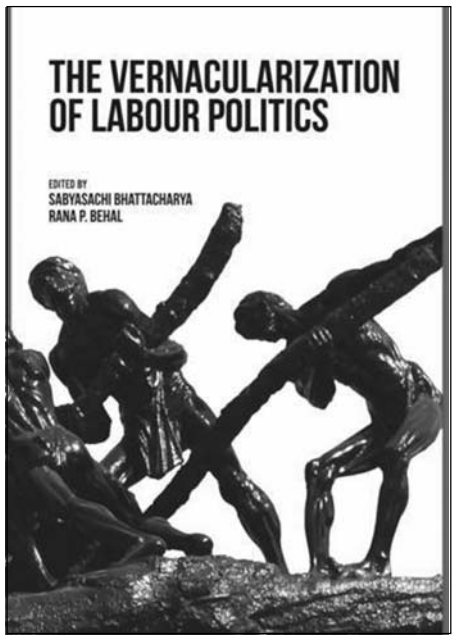
Ghazala Jamil

VERNACULARIZATION OF LABOUR POLITICS
Edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Rana P. Behal
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 347, ₹950.00

A lot of emphasis is being placed on the 'decline of trade unionism' in the realms of contemporary labour politics and studies. Numerous books and articles have appeared pointing towards a drop in the instances of protest and strikes, lower union density and registrations, to suggest weakening of this particular mode of organizing and organization. Although there are notable exceptions like Chile and Mexico where union membership increased substantially in the last couple of decades, the trend in union density is dismal by and large the world over. India is an illustration of the trend rather than an exception. Structural adjustments both in advanced economies and the developing ones due to globalization and liberalization have brought in changes such as increased casualization and labour mobility, which trade unions, by and large, have fallen short in comprehending and responding to adequately.

Increasingly a large number of workers engaged in sectors like construction, domestic work, readymade garments, are being served by NGOs, which essentially carry out welfare and support services in the face of extreme exploitation and immiseration of informal workers. Of late, a lot of NGOs have also started working with the informal workers using funding available for programmes such as Skill India or those targeted at specific constituencies such as *Seekho Aur Kamao* and USTAAD. Add to this the trend of moving away from organizing for workers rights to citizens rights (Agarwala 2015). In this regard, it must also be noted that Trade Unions aligned with political parties act to further the electoral agendas of the party but the parties rarely, when they come to power, take steps to promote and protect the interests of these workers' unions. The position of the RSS affiliated trade union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh while a BJP led government is in power is a textbook illustration of this trend. On account of this environment of despondency in the wake of neo-liberal uncertainties, it is not surprising that workers flock to groups offering a new religious certainty (van der Linden 2016).

Vernacularization Of Labour Politics is thus an opportune comment on the scenario described above. The editor Sabyasachi



Bhattacharya says the volume is a signifier for solidarity of labouring people to pursue an agenda 'that runs parallel with or replaces the trade unions' agenda' (p . 2). Creation of such solidarity, though, is not merely a recent phenomenon as this volume shows amply. And frequently it is seen that systemic change is not one of the primary objectives that brings about such solidarities. In addition to being a comment on the labour politics the volume also aims at being a historiographical intervention.

The formation of the Association of Indian Labour Historians (AILH) in 1996 and, subsequently, its first conference in 1998, were hailed as moments carrying a 'promise of revival' of Labour History in India after a period of decline in the fortunes of both—the discipline and its subjects (Mathew 1998). In 2010, a contribution on historiography of labour politics in India by prominent labour historians noted a revival of interest in labour history and called it 'distinctive' because it emanated from the global south and concerned itself with workers in occupations and locations beyond the industrial workforce (Behal, Joshi and Mohapatra 2010).

Two decades later, the volume under review—a collection of some of the papers presented in the Ninth and Tenth International

Conferences of AILH—deduces from its contributing chapters a conceptual shift in the understanding of labour politics—from what is termed as 'classical paradigm' to 'vernacular labour politics'. In his editorial introduction to the volume, Bhattacharya characterizes vernacular labour politics, firstly, by foregrounding of community; secondly, by a move from focusing on labour unions to a plurality of organizations which have other social objectives, and thirdly, by a loss of universalism. So, understanding labour politics *and labour politics itself* is no longer about 'long run of history' nor about 'proletarian internationalism' both of which are characteristics of the classical paradigm. Particularism is now the mantra of Labour history, which finds that at the core of labour politics often communitarian identities are at play, and increasingly its focus is on local, short-term, and unit level grievances.

Since temporally the 'vernacularization' trend is being deduced in this volume from histories of labour politics over a period stretching from late eighteenth century to until very recently, it appears that 'vernacularization of labour politics' may be more of a historiographical matter than one of transformation in modes of politics. Further, if vernacularization of labour politics is characterized by recognition and scholarship on aspects of workers' organizations which were until now ignored in conventional studies of Labour Politics, then calling it Social History of Labour or New Labour History should have sufficed. A tighter definition of the term may have clarified this confusion.

The geography of the 'vernacularization' of labour history perspective also merits closer scrutiny. Of the 13 contributing chapters, nine are from India, one each from China and Ghana, and two from Brazil. The editorial introduction does not clarify if it is being argued that vernacularization of labour politics as characterized in the volume is occurring only in the developing world. These ambiguities linger on because none of the contributing authors invoke the term 'vernacularisation of labour politics'.

The volume has been divided into three parts titled *Vernacular Alternatives to Trade Unions*, *State and Social Regulation in the Vernacular Mode Ideologies of Power and Resistance in the Vernacular Idiom*.

In the first part, Aardra Surendran's valuable study of non-union associational organizations of public sector workers in Maharashtra finds incongruence between the views regarding probable gains of unionization in the face of insecurities resulting from neoliberalism, and the workers' broader worldview which include elements of hegemonic consciousness. She bases this on the prevalence of perception among the workers that their larger politics (inclined towards Shiv Sena) and their participation in Union politics have no implication in each other's context.

The contribution of Mira Velayudhan to the volume is a rich narrative woven from an ethnography of caste subordination and reclamation of backwater lands in Kuttanad, Kerala. The narrative highlights the experiential aspects of transformation of landscape and labour relations such as mobilization into labour unions by political parties; landlord-labourer relationship as articulated through participation in popular struggles, religious/cultural activities, and the hardships and suffering of the reclamation work for the landlord or the state; and more recently, NGO interventions. Tracing the 'reciprocal relations established between workers and populist political leaders', Paulo Fontes shows how workers organized into neighbourhood associations that went beyond the politics of trade unions even as they employed a strong association with the image and needs of the workers in the arena of electoral politics to influence urbanization during the 60s and 70s in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Santosh Kumar Rai's chapter is a nuanced telling of the history of the Muslim Julaha community's attempts at refashioning elements of their caste and religious identity to formulate their response to the national movement and communal politics, and simultaneous adherence to older traditional forms of caste restrictions. In the last chapter in this section, Eric Florence discusses the cultural politics employed by the Chinese party-state in adjusting to global capitalism. He argues that the symbolic positioning of migrant peasant workers as efficient, hard-working and self-reliant individuals has aided in the transformation of the relationship of the party-state and its subjects, shifting the focus from relations of production to a strong emphasis on productivity.

In Part II of the volume Prasannan Parthasarathi proposes that the narrative of the Poonamallee insurgence of 1796 should not be read as caused solely by the revenue intermediaries, as suggested in the reading of colonial archive, but via mobilizing caste solidarities among the peasants. Furthering the theme of social regulation, in his contribution Robert Slenes contends that people of colour who became first-time slave owners in Brazil between 1750 and 1850 found themselves pushed into negotiations for manumission. This was in contrast with established farmers who had large slave holdings and were much less likely to entertain such bargaining. Thus, Slenes dubs these first-timers as 'precarious masters' and postulates a convergence of free and slave black identities due to material constraints both faced.

In her contribution Vidhya Raveendranathan describes the creation of new categories of workers and reconstitution of caste stigma through legal and technical restructuring of manual scavenging by the colonial Madras government. The chapter describes how the sanitation workers well-entrenched in the official labour regime conducted strikes to bargain for better wages and other provisions.

Bidisha Dhar's chapter discusses the Zardozi artisans of Lucknow from 1860s to 1940s, wherein she argues that the colonial governmentality of identification, counting and documenting artisanal work resulted in restrictions and stereotyping of the artisanal community. In the last chapter of this section Cassandra Mark Thiesen discusses reproduction of pre-colonial social and economic hierarchies in the colonial context through indebtedness in Ghana. The case in point is how gold mine labour recruiters utilize the credit ties of rural workers and their 'need to be indebted' in the traditional system of patronage.

This section of the volume brings together contributions in which workers' associations based on caste, ethnic or race relations are discussed. Pre-colonial modes of recruiting workers and organizing protest by the oppressed are studied as 'regulation in vernacular mode' and caste is claimed to be 'not only vestige of the past, but also a social resource for the workers' to accrue class benefits. Here the question arises if the term 'vernacular' is being used in the sense of the colonizer's interpellation of the native since oppressive structures of rigidly stratified societies such as caste are termed as 'resource'. This is also reminiscent of workers being termed 'human resources'.

The chapters in Part III seek to display 'vernacularity reflected in the ideologies of political and economic power and resistance of those oppressed under such power' (p. 16). In this attempt the contributions continue to read the colonial state's practices that nurtured caste based hierarchies.

The chapter by Maya John highlights that colonial labour regulations affected labour segmentation in the workforce on caste lines. She argues that proportionate reservation was one of several such measures

that were extended only to the elite and affluent among the oppressed castes and mentions Ambedkar's opposition to Communist led trade union movement as an illustration of untouchable and backward caste leadership pandering to colonial fragmenting of labour interest through a politics of representation.

Further to subjecting backward caste leaders to scrutiny for their dealing with labour issue is a rare study by Shivangi Jaiswal of the different approaches of B.R. Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram to labour question when they held the labour portfolio in the Government of India during 1942–1946 and 1946–1952, respectively.

It is perhaps fitting that in the last chapter of the volume Leon Fink traces the genealogy of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947. It is this law that gets the blame, for being inflexible and overly restrictive with regard to the employer on the one hand and on the other for harming the labour interest and severely handicapping the Indian Labour movement.

Vernacularization of Labour Politics in addition to having an alternative outlook on history of workers, provides a very atypical view of history of mobilization of identities. In the final analysis, the question lingers on whether the label 'vernacular alternative' to trade unions not be saved for those associational activities of workers that have its constituents configured differently, use different strategies, and be of a different form compared to traditional trade unions; but be more successful in achieving the aims of trade unions. The true value of this book lies in the way it opens up opportunities, not so much for alternatives, but for reimagination and reconfiguration of labour politics in varying modes and forms that are informed of life-worlds of the workers and equipped to respond to the exigencies of time.

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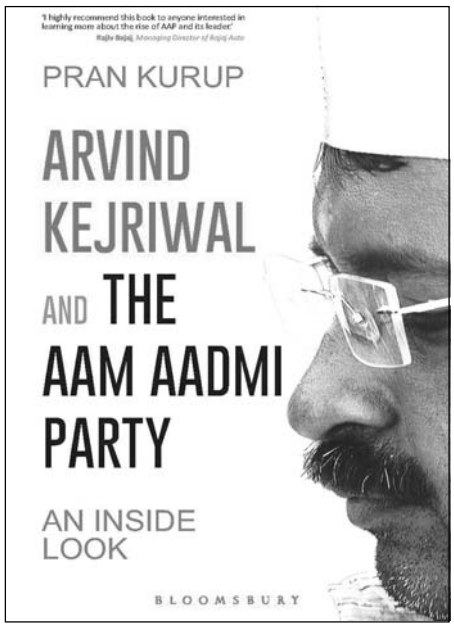
'Hagiography' Of A Political Technopreneur

Suraj Thube

ARVIND KEJRIWAL AND THE AAM AADMI PARTY
By Pran Kurup
Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 127, ₹399.00

The Indian political landscape has been remarkably reconfigured and re shaped due to certain developments in the recent past. Two events stand out, namely the coming to power of the BJP and the rise of the Aam Aadmi party headed by a social activist turned politician, Arvind Kejriwal. The latter is currently in power in Delhi with Kejriwal as its Chief Minister. Analysing a Chief Minister through entrepreneurial language is not new as it has been done in the past most explicitly in documenting the rise of Chandrababu Naidu. In an increasingly free market economy in the post-reform period, this language was put to use to signify a change in the manner in which an entrepreneur is perceived in public. Productivity and not greed symbolized an entrepreneur's image (Rudolph & Rudolph). Pran Kurup in his latest book looks at Arvind Kejriwal as a political entrepreneur through this positive outlook. His focus moves much ahead of this logic of economics to primarily deal with 'his personal nature, thought process and mental makeup'. The deciphering of this personality becomes the base of the synoptic overview he tries to give of the rise of AAP, its internal working mechanisms, Party squabbles and the eventual consolidation of power.

The author is a close friend of Arvind Kejriwal and the two have known each other since their IIT Kharagpur days. He himself is an active member of the AAP who has contributed directly in the extensive use of technology which the Party has internalized. The book is full of personal stories and anecdotes with arguably the chapter of their undergraduate days being the most refreshing of them all. His personal nature is constantly reinforced by underlining him being a teetotaler and how he was different from his classmates who were more into everything other than academics. Politics was never something which he was fond of and the only election he stood for was that of his hostel mess. What exactly transpired in his mind while making the transition between an IIT graduate and a social activist is something that gets scant attention. This remains very much the same when he moved away from his social activism to actively embrace politics. A seamless narrative seems lacking especially in giving out specific contextual reasoning for the decisions he made over the years. What gets the most of the author's attention is his leadership skills and his impeccable personal credentials and probity more than his overall political philosophy.



The author very emphatically opines that 'Kejri', as he is fondly called by his friends, has managed to deliver on his Party's core principles like anti-corruption, decentralization and having a more direct interface with his electorate. He credits much of this to the 'open source politics' which the AAP seems to have believed in right since its inception. This basically underscores the transparent nature adopted by the Party coterie in issuing tickets and making it a hassle free, online process that invites everyone to register themselves who feel committed to the idea of AAP. If Kejriwal is an entrepreneur, his Party is projected as an enterprise akin to a 'start up' exuberating with zest, intrepidity and resoluteness. The rise of the AAP is largely credited here to all the volunteers who have tirelessly worked in pursuit of their goal of creating an alternative sphere of politics. The contribution of the NRI is highlighted as it was that group which made copious use of technology like Google Hangouts in order to disseminate the Party principles across the country. In fact, it is this vibrant group of supporters who encouraged Kejriwal to

travel abroad to connect with the larger audience and subsequently also to realize the importance of social media for building the image of the Party. Unfortunately, this aspect is less explored in terms of the differences within the volunteers and the possible myriad reasons for them to work for an untested political project. Reasons like 'coming together for the love of the country', 'concern for their motherland' and having an utter disdain for how nothing positive has happened since Independence seem grossly inadequate and superficial. The largely entrepreneurial viewing overpowers the motley political calculations that must have gone through the decision making process.

The silicon valley gobbledygook continues with the author dividing the AAP members into two broad categories, namely—the *action wing* and the *poorna funda*. The former is the group that believes in tangible, practical work and the latter is shown as epitomizing the intellectual base of the party. Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and a few others fall in the former category as they believe in quick thinking and result oriented work whereas members like Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan typified the bookish and cerebral space of the Party. While exploring the inner Party squabbles, the author very categorically dismisses the *poorna funda* group for never being able to understand the idea of AAP. While Prashant Bhushan is shown as someone who had precious little time in engaging with the everyday Party politics, Yogendra Yadav was simply left out of the innate working style of the Party and thereby rendered incompatible with the same. When the author addresses the accusation of Kejriwal having a coterie of his own, he is essentially hailing the active nature of the *action wing* as against the staid presence of the intellectuals. Like many other claims made in the book, it mostly remains all bauble minus the intricate details. This can also be seen in his emphasis on the negative media coverage of the AAP, especially during the build up toward the 2015 Assembly elections. Sweeping claims are made about the factors that contributed to the rise of AAP and of those that perennially acted as a hindrance to its growth. The traditional media serves almost as the face of this latter story. Other criticisms coming from the public regarding his periodic invocation of God and his ubiquitous usage of Hindi also get addressed in a perfunctory manner. That there is a sound, calculated political rationale behind these manoeuvres other than they being purely logical is summarily discarded.

There are no pointed questions about the issue of the much romanticized notion of corruption which the AAP was supposed to answer. Many other limitations can be thought of which find no mention in the book. On the whole, it already sees it as a 'successful' Party headed by a leader with no shortcomings. Its constant eulogizing of the leader's personality traits comes tantalizingly close at times to making it seem like a hagiographical account. The inherent problems with a leader centric Party reinforcing the popular public morality of leadership cuts no ice with the authors style of constructing this story. It will provide surface pleasure to all those interested in the idea of AAP with the hitherto unknown facts about Kejriwal's personal life and few anecdotes of the Party's style of working. Others hoping to get a glimpse of his broader political worldview will want far more in terms of depth, content and the myriad ways to understand the phenomenon of AAP.

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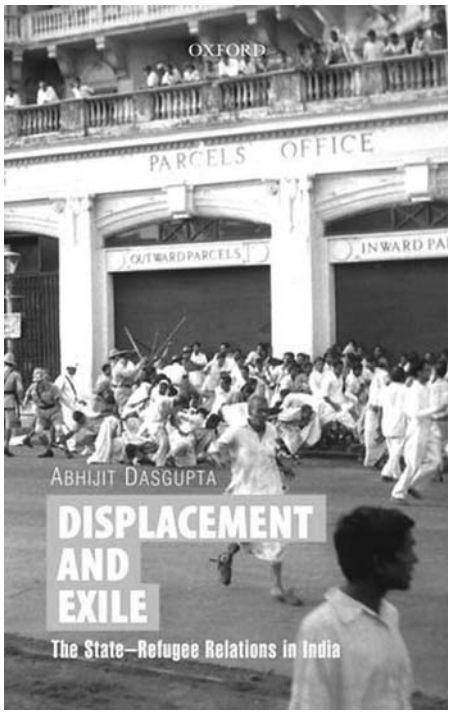
Coercive or Humanitarian?

Mahtab Alam

DISPLACEMENT AND EXILE: THE STATE-REFUGEE RELATIONS IN INDIA
By Abhijit Dasgupta
Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. xxxi+234, ₹750.00

India is not a signatory to the 1951 (United Nations High Commission for Refugees-UNHCR) Refugee Convention nor to its 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees, two key instruments defining the term 'refugee' and outlining 'the rights of the displaced, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them'. Hence, the obvious question is, in that case, what are the relations between refugee/displaced people and the state of their temporary or 'permanent' residence. Abhijit Dasgupta, a Professor in the Department of Sociology in Delhi University and the author of the book under review investigates the above question at length along with others related to the trials and tribulations of refugees and the displaced in India with a South Asian perspective in mind. In doing so, Dasgupta studies the question of 'agency and voices of people who flee across an international border, the identities they forge for themselves, their contributions to their new surroundings, and their interactions with the state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)'. And this he does by studying three broad groups of people, a) the 'Partition refugees' from East Pakistan to West Bengal, b) 'Tamil refugees' from Sri Lanka to India, mainly Tamil Nadu and c) 'Bangladesh Liberation War refugees' from East Pakistan to West Bengal.

Divided into three main chapters, the first chapter deals with different aspects of state-refugee relationship in West Bengal, especially the state policies towards refugees belonging to the scheduled castes (STs), scheduled tribes (STs), and the urban poor. In fact, it is this aspect of Dasgupta's work which differentiates it from the existing literature on the 'Partition refugees'. He rightly opines that 'the displacement of upper caste Hindus, or of the *bhadralok* or elite Bengalis, has occupied the centre stage in the discourse on population displacement.' Moreover, on a national level whenever we talk of Partition and its aftermath, we ended up mainly talking about Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs families. The problems faced by Dalits/Harijans, Adivasis and the urban poor hardly figures in our discussions, this despite the fact, as Dasgupta's study reveals, that in 1952, out of the total displaced persons, 21 percent belonged to the SC community and 2.6 percent were from the ST community. Com-



paratively speaking, it might be smaller in numbers, what distinguished SCs and STs from Upper Caste Hindus is that, while the latter began to move and settle in cities and towns, the SCs and the STs went to the rural areas and new satellite towns. Hence, they were further marginalized. In order to study the issue in detail, Dasgupta focuses on three sites tracing 'the nature of coercive strategies against marginalized sections of the society.' While two of these sites are located in West Bengal itself, the third one was in Dandakarnaya, then parts of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and now part of Chhattisgarh.

The chapter dealing with the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India, who arrived in Tamil Nadu in 1983 in the wake of the worst ethnic strife in the island shows through case studies how policies and politics towards refugees were not just determined and influenced by local-level (state/regional) politics but also by India's relations with Sri Lanka. However, what is important to note here is that the state policies towards the refugees remained inconsistent, which raises larger questions about state-refugee relation, which has been examined in greater detail in this chapter. Here he points towards coercive use of power against refugees, such as deportation, eviction and incarceration of displaced people. He also draws our attention towards the fact that, how over a period of time, a friendly location of residence for refugees can turn hostile, citing the treatment of Tamil refugees in the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. This is true about other places as well.

'The state', notes Dasgupta 'in order to justify its action, often used legal codes. In the case of incarceration of refugees, an archaic Foreigners Act was used.' The author citing examples also shows how in the name of third country asylum, India tried to get rid of Tamil Sri Lankan refugees. This chapter also deals with the day-to-day life of refugees in camps and how the state uses various means of surveillance in the name of security in order to control. Towards the end of the chapter, the author rightly points toward some of the very important instances of (in)action of Sri Lankan and the Indian state, such as silence on the army atrocities on the civilians and India's abstention from voting on the 2014 resolution against Sri Lanka, seeking an international investigation into war crimes committed by the state etc. A recent news report on the plight of Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu (*India Today*, 9 June 2016) confirms the author's observation about the fate of Tamil refugees in India.

In his study of Bangladesh Liberation War Refugees Dasgupta points out India's shift in policy towards refugees in this case. Particularly, the state made an attempt to show to the international community that without being a signatory to the Convention (1951) and Protocol (1967), it can handle a massive crisis like the one it was facing. This chapter, using both primary as well as secondary sources and data, studies the factors that caused massive displacement, how the crisis did bring the community together and what was the relationship between the refugees and the hosts. And most importantly, it discusses the issues of 'economic refugees', 'infiltrators', and 'environmental refugees'.

Throughout the book, the author critically engages with the debates around 'agency', 'location' and 'citizenship', which makes the study not just stimulating but also draws our attention towards some of the lesser explored aspects, or what can be called the positive aspects of displacement and exile. As the author notes, due to extremely adverse conditions, women too gained agency, which in traditional Bengali society had hardly happened. Similarly, in case of Tamil refugees, women became the chief earning members. What is interesting is that Dasgupta, through the case studies included in the book, not only meticulously documents the plight of refugees, negligence of the state(s) over the years but also establishes refugees and displaced people as agents of change. This perspective is very significant given how refugees are viewed across the world. Dasgupta's access to unpublished official as well as non-governmental reports and their use is a value add to the existing literature on displacement and refugees. However, the author's faith in institutions like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) seems misplaced given the political nature of these commissions in all its practicality. Hence, one feels the book lacks in terms of policy recommendations. It would have been great if the author could have come up with some concrete suggestions through which India can move beyond what Dasgupta calls, oscillating between two extremes, 'coercion on the one hand and humanitarian considerations on the other.' Because, as he aptly describes, '(B)y doing this, the state has created more complexities and confusions.'

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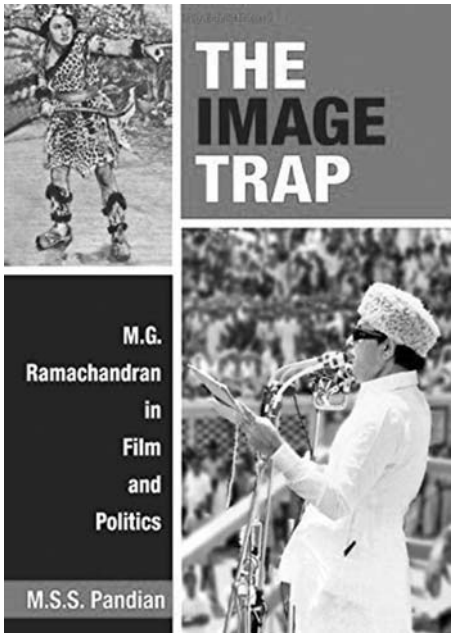
Making Sense Of Tamil Nadu's Cultural Politics

Nalini Rajan

THE IMAGE TRAP: M.G. RAMACHANDRAN IN FILM AND POLITICS
By M.S.S. Pandian
Sage Publications, 2015, pp. 162, ₹645.00

DOING STYLE: YOUTH AND MASS MEDIATION IN SOUTH INDIA
By Constantine V. Nakassis
Orient BlackSwan, 2016, published by arrangement with The University of Chicago Press, pp. 317, ₹1075.00



When the official funeral of Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa of Tamil Nadu was held on December 7, 2016, there were shadow or mock funerals in several parts of the State. Many of the Chief Minister's followers shaved their heads as a mark of funereal respect, and a few even immolated themselves. Curiously, these acts—which represent almost a personal bond between actor-turned politicians and their followers—are reminiscent of the events surrounding the death of Jayalalithaa's mentor, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), nearly three decades earlier, in 1987.

What causes the poorest among Tamils to venerate these public figures? According to Pandian, the reasons are certainly not to be found in the largely regressive, pro-rich economic and political policies followed by MGR and, one could add, also by Jayalalithaa. But Pandian's story is confined to MGR, who had the world's largest fan following as an actor, and utilized this enormous loyal group in 1972 to form the backbone of his political party, Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (ADMK)—later known as All-India Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). The boundary between the fan association and the political party was clearly blurred. MGR, the actor, metamorphosed into MGR, the political spokesman of the poor and the downtrodden. As Pandian points out, the MGR story is also a Gramscian parable of the success of dominant ideologies in producing consent among the subaltern classes (p. 17).

What were the conditions that allowed such consent to take place in Tamil Nadu? Rural electrification on a large scale was undertaken by the State's Congress governments before 1967, and cinema was introduced to the rural subaltern classes as a form of entertainment. Cinema has acted as a great leveller in Tamil Nadu. While Tamil indigenous folk performance encouraged hierarchical seating based on caste and class, cinema tickets were only based on the buyer's purchasing power. Indeed, the 1961 Census revealed that cinema was the most popular medium of entertainment in rural Tamil Nadu, which probably has the largest number of cinema halls in India.

Between the late 1940s and 1972, MGR was the poster boy for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's propaganda films, where the actor-hero could make history by vanquishing villains, dispensing justice, and rendering all things well in the Tamil country. Inevitably, the fans were in awe of MGR's invincibility while fighting, fencing, performing Tamil martial forms, not to mention mauling tigers and bending crowbars. MGR systematically donned the role of each subaltern class—worker, boatman, cowherd, rickshaw-puller, fisherman—and celebrated the humble gruel over the food of the rich. At the same time, literacy, in MGR's films, was a subversive tool to expose the evil landlord or trader, or indeed any villain who used his power to oppress the lower classes. After all, the Dravidian movement had been engaged in a protracted struggle against the Tamil Brahmin's hegemony over knowledge systems.

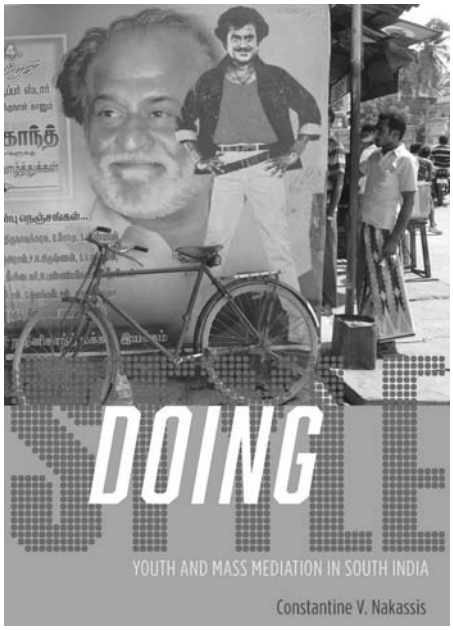
Quite significantly, MGR as subaltern hero appropriated the sartorial, linguistic and performative habits of the caste and class elite. He stood upright, refused to kowtow to authority, used authoritative language, and wore his bright-coloured clothes with aplomb. In Pandian's words:

> Fearlessness, virility and youthfulness are all overlapping categories in Tamil culture. MGR always took care, during his public appearances, to project an image of eternal youth. His ever present wig and fur cap concealed his balding pate, a traditional index of aging and lack of virility. His dark glasses made the wrinkles around his eyes invisible, and he always presented himself before the public heavily made up (p. 105).

In fact, an important aspect of MGR's films has been the appeal they held for subaltern women, who easily responded to, even desired, the actor's physicality—light skin, rippling muscles, tight-fitting clothes. Sentiments were heightened in the darkened cinema hall as women experienced a near-delirious sense of freedom watching MGR's heroine exercising her choice to marry the man she loved, outside the norms of caste and class. MGR not only played the role of guardian and protector of women, he was particular that the woman he desired sublimated her sexuality and appeared chaste and modest in dress and demeanour. The non-conforming woman spoke more English than Tamil, wore western attire—shorts, t-shirts, skirts—and was contemptuous of rural culture. Till such time as this independent woman assumed the ideals of the 'good' Tamil woman, she was subjected to the hero's indifference or contempt. Since MGR's films did much better in rural or semi-rural areas than in urban centres, it became important to reinforce the virtues of the peasant and of the Tamil language.

It would be an error to imagine that women in Tamil society are, by and large, a subdued and oppressed lot. There have been challenges to patriarchy in female subaltern culture in the form of subversion of upper caste notions of morality, celebration of lovers, and aspiration of freedom from male presence. As Pandian informs us, in the Tamil folk representation of Ramayana, Sita is violent enough to slay the multi-headed Ravana herself (p. 87). These kinds of female transgressions are an impossibility in MGR films.

In contrast to popular Tamil ballad tragic heroes like Maduraiveeran, Muthupattan, and Chinnanadan, who turned the caste hierarchy upside down and, in doing so, died terrible deaths, the ideologically conservative MGR film was unconcerned with doing away with property or power relations. The idea was to change the villainous landlord or industrialist or trader into a good landlord or industrialist or trader. The social order was not overturned, and the hero had no call to die tragically. In MGR's worldview, there were benevolent self-sacrificing givers, and



then there were grateful, faithful takers. It is hardly surprising that while the subversive ballad heroes had only local appeal, MGR had a pan-Tamil presence. This was aided and abetted by the elite-controlled cinematic medium and the political backing by first the DMK, and then the ADMK. The image reinforced by these parties of MGR was that of a royal, quasi-divine personage, riding a chariot bearing a garland containing10,000 roses. These carnivalesque processions, with elephants and sixty-feet tall cut-outs of MGR, were also occasions when MLAs and ministers would fall at the feet of the actor-politician, who assumed the role of a god. Is it any wonder, then, that a few of his followers built shrines where MGR could be worshipped? MGR's 'magical' likeness was also to be found in t-shirts, lockets, keychains, stickers, and wall calendars in the market-place.

Part of the reason the subaltern classes found it difficult to distinguish between the real and reel life of MGR was the carefully orchestrated propaganda surrounding his actions as politician and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Among the few welfare measures enacted by MGR, the most well known is the 1982 free noon meal scheme, which covered one-sixth of the State's population. This was the time when several popular biographies of the 'benevolent' Chief Minister appeared in simple Tamil, replete with grammatical errors. The gist of these accounts was that MGR was born in extreme poverty, and then acquiring wealth as an actor, he chose to renounce it as a politician, in the service of the poor.

It is what Pandian calls the 'fragmentary character of the subaltern common sense' that allowed the poor to believe it was always 'others' who took bribes without MGR's knowledge; it was always 'others' who prevented MGR's direct communication with the people; and it was always the government that failed, not MGR. Pandian, however, believes that it is possible to create 'a new progressive common sense', with the rise of dissent in the ranks of the party or even within the fan club (p.144).

Almost 30 years on, it looks as though there is something approaching a new progressive common sense among a group of lower middle class college students (many from rural backgrounds) in Madurai and Chennai, whose acts of style involve their entanglement with the producers of fake brands of clothing, with the television VJs of shows like SS Music who use swatches of Tamil in English ('Tanglish'), and with mass film heroes and their producers. This is the basis of the research work conducted between 2007 and 2014 in three Madurai and two Chennai colleges by American scholar, Constantine Nakassis, who is also fluent in Tamil. If Tamil Nadu has more lower middle class college students than most other Indian States, it is because of the caste-based reservation policies put in place as early as the 1920s in the Madras Presidency. Most of the students interviewed in this book come from working class, lower caste, first generation, Tamil-medium school backgrounds.

Nakassis's opening story is about Antony, a Chennai student, who has an extraordinarily large moustache, reminiscent of that sported by Tamil actor Suriya in the 2010 film, *Singam*. While Antony's moustache invoked Suriya's, he had refashioned it to be something different. Antony's moustache was not Suriya's, and yet it was not not Suriya's. This capacity, or necessity, to inhabit—even flirt with—numerous roles or identities at once is what Nakassis calls 'citational'. Antony was criticized by his peers for the moustache, because it was that of a 'big man', an adult; it was age and status inappropriate; it was old-fashioned, rural, aggressive. A large part of this criticism was voiced by another student, Prabhu, who had scant facial hair, and therefore was viewed as a 'little boy', with deficient masculinity. Young men 'doing style' are expected to occupy a liminal space, somewhere in-between 'over style' (Antony's) and 'under style' (Prabhu's), between being a child and an adult. Every stylish act, like Antony's, could easily tip over to the realm of 'over style', and the stylist would then be subjected to teasing, gossip, social boycott, or even physical altercation by the peer group.

Thus liminality and citationality constitute these lower middle class students' acts of doing style. Take the relationship of the students with the 'king of style', actor Rajnikanth. To be stylish, or to performatively 'do style', is not just to imitate Rajnikanth or to worship him, for that would be too crass, 'local', or rural. While citing Rajnikanth or any other popular Tamil film star, youth necessarily mark themselves as being distinct from them. This is the case with Madurai college student, Prakash, who adapts dance steps from actor Vijay's *Pokkiri Pongal*, to his own style of dancing. Prakash thereby puts a distance between himself and ordinary, awe-struck fans of the actor, by asserting his agency, class, and education. It is the in-betweenness, the ambivalence about one's place in kinship, caste, class, age-related hierarchies that leads to youth's production of an inhabitable, shifting subjectivity. As some of the students ruefully explained to Nakassis, 'growing up' meant fixity, like acquiescing to the dictates of the caste group in marriage, and in other social matters. But as a college-going youth, one is outside of caste and adult society, and one can do style. In this egalitarian space, there is intimacy, reciprocity, peer pressure, sharing of food, class notes, clothing, cigarettes, words of abuse, fictive kin terms, like the stylishly phrased 'mams' for 'mama', 'maaps' for 'maapilai'—the Tamil equivalent of the English 'bro' or 'dude'.

The youth in question differentiated themselves from both the elite, upper class students (who wore branded clothes and were fluent in English, and considered 'doing style' as gauche) and those from economically deprived backgrounds, who were too poor to even think about doing style. The kind of clothes worn by those interviewed by the author were mostly produced in small workshops in towns like Tiruppur and Erode, which distributed cheap, low quality garments, that were peddled as 'export-surplus branded clothes'. These were clothes that paired Adidas's three-stripe logo with the Fila brand, or with well-known brands like Nike, Reebok, or 'Pumaa', lesser-known ones like Diesel, Columbia (changed to 'Columbian'), and so on. Indeed, the brands displayed on the shirts and jeans had no fixity or coherence. For youth, it was not brand identity that mattered, but 'brandedness'. Madurai student Yuvaraj could afford to buy authorized brand goods, but preferred the cheaper duplicate or fake brand garments, in order to fit in with the peer group. Wearing the authentic stuff would risk drawing charges of arrogance, 'over style', acting like a big man, or showing off.

The unsettling of the brand in clothing is echoed in the use of language by youth. Here, doing style is to inhabit the liminal

space of avoiding both pure Tamil (which would be too local or rural) and fluent English ('over style'). Just as economics decided youth's preference for brandedness over authentic brands, anxiety about speaking English shaped their attitude to language. While the young men interviewed by Nakassis agreed that English constituted style and created a way out of the parochialism of Tamil, they also kept the English language at arm's length, and merely inserted English words into Tamil grammatical constructions. English was not viewed as a functional or literary language; it was an accessory that enhanced the style of the user as did brandedness in clothes. Both pure Tamil and broken English with exaggerated accents were parodied as the characteristics of country hicks; equally, those who spoke fluent English within the peer group were censured for their snobbish 'over style', for playing the 'Peter'. A young woman who did the same was dubbed a 'Peter akka' or 'older sister Peter'. On the other hand the stylish VJs at SS Music television station were considered to be different from the over-the-top Peters, even though they sprinkled only a few Tamil words in their (largely) English presentation, mainly because of the social distance between them and their audience. Like popular film stars or elite college students, the VJs represented youth style par excellence, and could not be accused of indulging in 'over style'.

While it is true that—with education—these young men have travelled a great distance from their parents or grandparents, in terms of not being blindly devoted to public figures like film stars or politicians, their 'new progressive common sense' is perhaps not progressive enough when it comes to their views on young women students 'doing style'. Any female college student who does style sartorially, or linguistically, or even while dancing like Prakash, will always be accused by young men as doing 'over style', showing off, or drawing undue attention to herself. In short, female students simply cannot do style. Male anxiety accelerates when young women start behaving exactly like young men. It appears, then, that notions of women's chastity and modesty have not progressed much since the MGR era.

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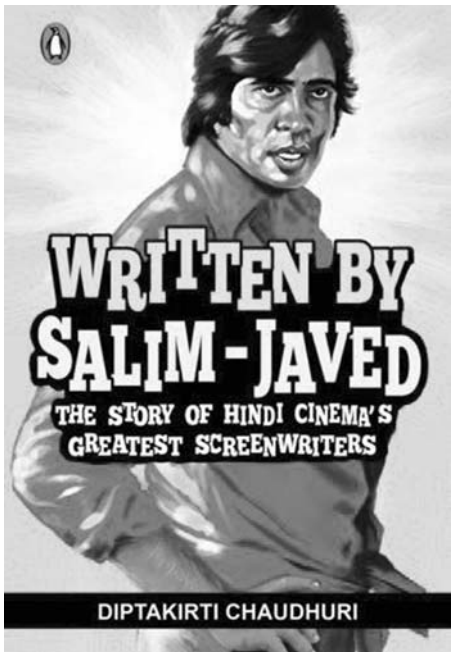
Bringing Alive An Era

Ipsita Sahu

WRITTEN BY SALIM-JAVED: THE STORY OF HINDI CINEMA'S GREATEST WRITERS
By Diptakirti Chaudhuri
Penguin Books, India, 2015, pp. 372, ₹399.00

Chaudhuri's lucidly written page-turner can become so engrossing that it transports the reader, as though through a time machine as an 'invisible witness', to the actual events of Bombay film industry in the 1970s. Perhaps the subject of the book is itself compelling enough, bringing together giants such as superstar Amitabh Bachchan, the celebrated film *Sholay*, and the legendary duo—Salim-Javed. But there also lies the strength of the book, as it approaches areas already often written about, and yet is able to reveal substantial new information and insights.

The book is interestingly structured. It opens with the story of a court case won by Salim-Javed in 2013 demanding huge amounts for the remake rights of the original script written by them of film *Zanjeer*. The amount paid to the writers, even in today's date, continues to be the highest payment for script-writing and thus is established the unparalleled legacy of the duo, which has not been able to be matched in nearly five decades. This recent event also reveals much about the exceptionally enterprising and zealous attitude of Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar undauntingly fighting an intimidating industry. Having paid homage to this recent event and the lasting legacy, with an introductory chapter, the rest of the book cuts back to the era of the 1970s, when the tides originally turned as young, struggling Salim-Javed entered the film industry and transformed it forever. Their confidence, conviction, clarity and commitment to claiming credit, as much as their creative talent led to changes in Bombay cinema-dialogues became the pulse of the films and for the first time, scriptwriting attained as much recognition and stardom as on screen performance and the duo were sometimes paid even more than the highest paid actors. Song and dance and romances of the 1960s gave way to explosive, often cynical dramas reflective of the social and political turbulence of the era. Such was the impact of their films that this moment is fittingly considered to be the highest point of Bombay cinema as Salim-Javed films singularly imparted an aura, resonance and face to the 70s decade—embodied in their key character—the 'Angry Young Man' avatar.



The first half of the book is almost cinematic in itself—as it presents a tight montage of the Salim-Javed films in an episodic manner, with a surprise element at the end of each chapter threading the filmography. The book systematically goes through a chronological assessment of the films—the plots, characters, dialogues and provides interesting trivia of how each story, film and its scenes were shaped by various elements such as the actor's and producer's roles and demands and the writer's personal histories. For instance, film *Haathi Mere Saathi*, a big box office hit for Rajesh Khanna, was written from a rather peculiar brief by the south Indian producer to make a film with Rajesh Khanna and elephants. Another compelling account is of how Salim-Javed appointed a painter to paint their names on all the *Zanjeer* posters in the city, after being let down again and again by the false promises of a film industry too afraid to change the status quo and give due credit to writers. The first half of the book provides a fairly exciting glimpse of the ways in which the film industry functioned, the inside stories and exchanges between industry personnel, the competition, hierarchies, risks involved. As parallel stories, this section also culls out the gradual demise of Rajesh Khanna and the fallout with Salim-Javed, the discovery and professional friendship with

Amitabh Bachchan and his coinciding stardom along with that of Salim-Javed's, the rivalry between Bachchan and Shatrughan Sinha. The juxtaposition of films also brings out the similarities in plots and one is able to glean the distinct style of the duo, of the multi-starrer masala plot with several twists and turns, which became identified with 70s cinema, the various inspirations behind the scenes and the 'one burst of creativity' style in which the scripts were often written. At the same time, this section also maps the waning quality of the Salim-Javed screenplays as marital tensions, stardom and the pressures of extremely high expectations took a toll on the artists, leading to lesser risks and more and more repetitive stories and finally a split.

While keeping the focus on the partnership and stardom, the book also delves substantially into relevant biographical accounts in several chapters. It is fascinating to observe how the Salim-Javed films are so fundamentally related to their own lives. Both Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar's childhood was haunted by the absence of parental figures. Salim Khan's parents died when he was a teenager. Javed Akhtar's mother died when he was eight after which he was raised by relatives since his father, being an active Communist leader, remained underground for the large part of Akhtar's adolescent life. The gritty and captivating Oedipal themes of many of Salim-Javed films, the idealized yet out of reach mother and the pent up resentment directed towards an absentee father, the catastrophic familial barriers, could only be inspired from deep felt experiences of pain and estrangement, which is carefully narrated in the book.

Several other such critical themes of Salim-Javed films are discussed in detail in the second part of the book. The discussion on 'violence' in the films is rather interesting, as the author speaks of the lack of blood and gore and too many action sequences, and yet there was a suspense and build up of well crafted action scenes, a lasting impression of chilling psychological violence through angst driven characters and unscrupulously destructive villains—all of this ironically creating the first proper 'male action hero' with the brooding, angry character of Amitabh Bachchan. Curiously, the book points out that the genius of the writers was in taking up familiar plots—typical themes of lost and found, double roles, dacoit stories, family feud and imparting several twists and refurbishing them with remarkable transgression value. Javed Akhtar points out, 'I never wrote a story that has not come before'. The book also prudently lays out the influences of the writer—the American detective novels and bestsellers with spicy plots and one liners, the American western films. And yet the subversive elements of the Salim-Javed films were unmissable—even the women characters had completely transformed from coy, homely girls to self—assured working women, many sexually active and even unwed mothers without moral justification or apologies for their roles and action studded female protagonists.

The author draws attention to the quality of 'detail' in Salim-Javed films which interweaves intricate narratives with expert eloquence, and with each character having a thoughtful name and context adding to the appeal of the films such as in *Sholay*, the numerous peripheral yet memorable characters. At the same time, the actual everyday realities of the times also found their way into the storylines—black marketing, corruption, smuggling—the gap between rich and poor, the discontented youth, a general atmosphere of dishonesty and nepotism and favouritism in corporate sector. Another interesting chapter is 'Dialogues', the backbone of Salim-Javed films—which reveals the brainstorming behind many of the legendary 'repeat value' dialogues and the typical style of writing with an economy of words, attention to dialect and lingo, delivery styles, making the message consequently extremely impactful.

Another interesting section in the book briefly mounts the history of scriptwriting in Bombay cinema itself—since the 1950s and a time of great influx of literary figures into the industry such as Manto, Kaifi Azmi, Krishan Chander, Abbas, Sahir Ludhianvi to a lull in the 1960s, when colour, better cameras and the spectacle of scenic locations led to more romance and song and dance sequence, and less emphasis was given to screenplay and dialogues. Although lyricists rose to fame, scriptwriters became almost dispensable and were paid very meagre salaries. Despite the exception of the Salim-Javed case, the author points out the continuing invisibility of scriptwriters even in the current scenario.

Overall, the book tightly packs together many narrative strains and themes with a remarkable deftness. Without being too vested in personal life histories, the book also relates several accounts of the literary influences of Javed Akhtar, his relationship with Sahir Ludhianvi who became a significant mentor figure. The book indeed brings alive an era, an industry and its two central characters and is a useful read both for casual readers as well as anyone researching cinema of this period.

Ipsita Sahu is a PhD student in the Cinema Studies Department in Jawaharlal Nehru University, working on 1970s Bombay Cinema.

NEW RELEASES

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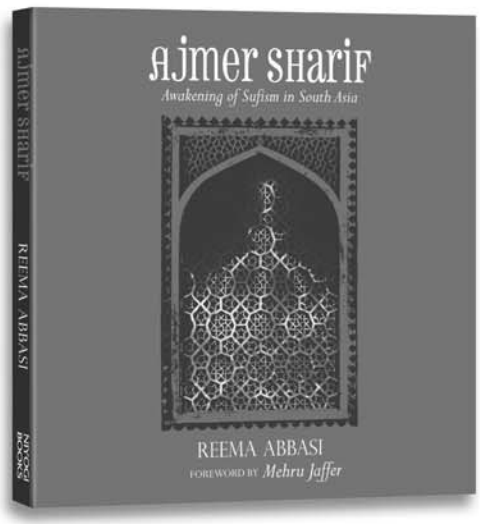

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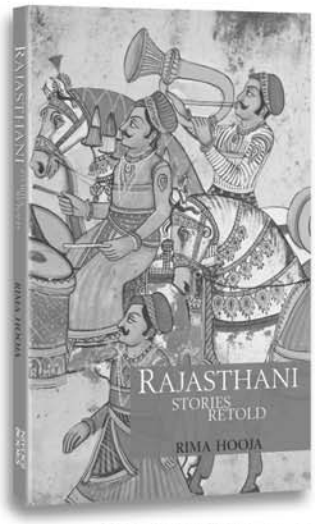

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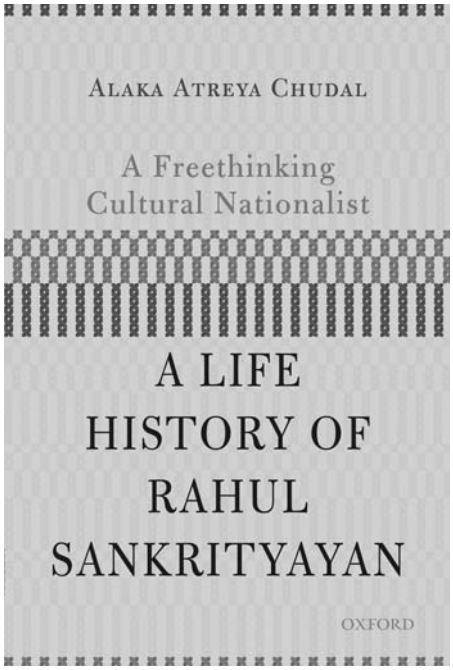
Quandary Of Nationalism, Buddhism And Marxism

Kamal Nayan Choubey



A FREETHINKING CULTURAL NATIONALIST: A LIFE HISTORY OF RAHUL SANKRITYAYAN
By Alaka Atreya Chudal
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, pp. xv+324, ₹950.00

The book under review is based on the doctoral research work of Alaka Atreya Chudal and it presents a well researched study of the life, politics and literary work of one of the most dynamic and controversial figures of the literary world, Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963). The author makes an attempt to challenge the prevailing understanding about him and seeks to establish him as a 'freethinking cultural nationalist'. Sankrityayan was a frequent traveller and famously known as *Ghumakkar-Raj* (King of wanderers). He did not get any formal university education but learnt many languages and subjects through his continuous travel to new places and interaction with diverse kinds of people. He was a phenomenal literary figure who published 125 titles and wrote in five languages i.e., Hindi, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan and Bhojpuri. He wrote on diverse subjects and forms, including philosophy, history, sociology, science, travelogue, biography, drama, essay, lexicography, Buddhism and politics. There were many shades in the life of Rahul, for example, he was a member of the Arya Samaj, a Buddhist scholar, a strong supporter of Hindi and a staunch Marxist. The writer of the book, however, identifies '*Abhiman* (pride) of being an Indian' as the key element running through in all these socio-political activities. She claims that the purpose of this book is to define Sankrityayan as a nationalist, 'though he was a Buddhist and Arya Samajist, his classic motives were not religious, nor were they internationalist, even though he became a Communist' (p. 15). The writer has focused on the different facets of the life and ideas of Sankrityayan and painstakingly attempted to show that in his whole life Sankrityayan worked with the idea of 'cultural nationalism' and it is a running theme in all his writing. This book covers the period from 1915 to 1961 (in 1915 he joined the Arya Samaj and in the year 1961 he lost his memory).

The book presents a critical study of Sankrityayan's life in a full chapter through a profound analysis of his autobiography *Meri Jeevan Yatra*. And in the next three chapters the author has presented a thorough study of three important turnings in his life. The first major turning was his relationship and work with the Arya Samaj (roughly from 1915–1920). The author argues that in this period Sankrityayan's nationalism was a mixture of the Arya Samaj principles and his own vague understanding of the Russian Revolution (initially based on some reports in the newspapers!!). During his association with the Arya Samaj he had faith in the Vedas and also emphasized the difference between the Arya Samaj and Hindu religion. However, from the days of his association with the Arya Samaj his notion of nationhood had been of a casteless independent people who followed the Vedic dharma. Indeed in this period he was an extreme nationalist. Chudal underlines that Sankrityayan presented his notion of nation as a 'completely secular and casteless face, with equal rights for every caste and each gender' (p. 19) and the notion of *ek jatiyata* (one nation) remained unchanged in his whole life. However, after his Arya Samaj days he advocated the ideals of Communism rather than the Vedas. It is also important to note that in his Arya Samaj days he differentiated between Hindus and Arya Samajists and claimed the latter were higher than the former. However, after he left the Arya Samaj his definition of a Hindu changed. In his revised definition, 'Hindu was not the name of a religious community, but rather of the collective bearers of Indian culture' (p. 109). Indeed after his Arya Samaj days he had no sympathy at all for religion-based politics and he refused the felicitation by the Hindu Sabha in 1925.

The second important turning in Sankrityayn's life was connected with the great influence of Buddhism in his life and writings. Chudal has described the shift in his ideas from the Arya Samaj to Buddhism and Communism as a result of his attempt to refine and improve himself. Sankrityayan's contribution enriched the field of Buddhist studies immensely. He searched many lost or less known Buddhist philosophical texts and made many Buddhist themes as the central part of his narratives. Indeed on Buddhist themes he wrote biographical, historical and philosophical works and enriched both the Hindi and Buddhist literary world. The author, however, has argued that Buddhism influenced him 'not so much as religion but as a product of Indian culture' (p. 37). She also clarifies that he was never a Buddhist in the normal sense of the word, he was rather a 'great admirer of the Buddha and Buddhism' (p. 186).

The third major turning of his life was his own notion of the Indian national language, which was different from his fellow Communists. His ideal nation was being based on pride in a 'common Indian culture and having Hindi as lingua franca' (p. 38). He saw Hindi as a common language and the vehicle of India's literature and culture. He was expelled from the CPI in December 1947 after his speech in the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Bombay, where he strongly opposed Urdu and called for the 'Indianizing of Islam' (p. 1). He not only opposed Urdu, but also opposed Hindustani (advocated by Gandhi) and held that 'Hindustani was a second more recent term for Urdu' (p. 211). Even though this view of Sankrityayan is troublesome for any secular person, it should be underlined that he was against the dominance of English and wanted to establish Hindi as the national language of India. However, he emphasized that all other languages, including Urdu, should be given ample opportunity and state help to exist and prosper. Indeed, as the author of the book herself underlines, he had always been against Hindu-Muslim sectarianism. He was saddened in particular by the lack of intermarriages between Hindus and Muslims (p. 211).

It should be noted that for the author the term cultural nationalist does not necessarily imply a hard core Right Wing politics. She presents it as a sense of pride for

one's country and culture. However, there are many instances in her analysis which show that Sankrityayan faced criticisms for his 'narrow' thinking. Three prominent examples mentioned in the book are: i) in his speech at the Akhil Bhartiya Sahitya Sammelan Sankrityayan in 1947 he said that 'Islam should become Indian' (p. 19–20). Second, in his depiction of an ideal egalitarian world society in his novel *Baisvi Sadi* Sakrityayan depicted Nepal as a part of India. Many Nepali literary critiques underlined it as the presence of 'extreme nationalist' feeling in the writings of Sakrityayan and the author of the book also concedes this argument. iii) Sankrityayan's staunch support for making Hindi the national language. To be fair, with Sankrityayan, it should be pointed out that he opposed communal politics and also emphatically advocated respect and recognition of other Indian languages. Also, in the book the author herself accepts that for him Nepal was a second home and he worked a lot to help the political activists of that country (Indeed she describes Sankrityayan's relationship with Nepal in detail!!). So, his depiction of Nepal as part of India in his one novel should not be construed as the imperialist designs of an Indian author!! It should be, however, accepted that all three instances suffice to conclude that nationalism always carries the danger of a propensity to create, dominate or exclude an 'other' and Sankrityayan's nationalism expresses this tendency in the above mentioned instances.

I wish to argue that through the analysis presented in this book it could be emphasized that rather than 'cultural nationalism', Marxism or a search for 'Indian Marxism' was the key concern in the writings of Rahul Sankrityayan. As a member of the Arya Samaj, he was influenced by the Russian Revolution in 1917, though he had no systematic understanding of Marxism then, and his knowledge was based on newspaper reports. After moving away from the Arya Samaj he joined the national movement and in jail wrote his first novel *Baisvi Sadi* (1925), in which he presented an imaginary picture of an egalitarian international system. Similarly in the autobiography *Meri Jeevan Yatra* he clearly writes that, 'Buddhist religion or philosophy could not do what Marxism can. Marx felt the necessity not only to explain the world and its entities but to change them' (Sankrityayan 1998: 229 quoted in p. 140). In his other writings he argued that Marxism gives a clear vision to change the world. It is true that he was expelled from the Communist Party of India (CPI) due to his views about Hindi, however, the biography of Rahul Sankrityayan by Gunakar Muley informs that he again became a formal member of the CPI in the year 1955 (Muley 1993: 55–56).

It could be argued that Maxism is present in the ideas of Sankrityayan with lots of other influences. Like most of the politically conscious youth of his time, nation/freedom struggle and building an egalitarian society was at the center of his writing. Indeed he made an attempt to create an 'Indian version of Marxism', which had a close relationship with the national movement, religion and issues related to the lives of the common masses of India. Indeed, he was aware that 'Marxism needs to be applied in every country according to the local situation, which is a most difficult task' (p. 195). Even though his Indian version of Marxism was fraught with contradictions he wrote many basic books which played a crucial role in making Marxism more familiar to the Hindi speaking masses. Apart from his famous book *Volga Se Ganga (1942)*, he wrote the biographies of Karl Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung (all in the year 1954) in lucid Hindi. So, it is appropriate to describe Sankrityayan as a freethinking Marxist.

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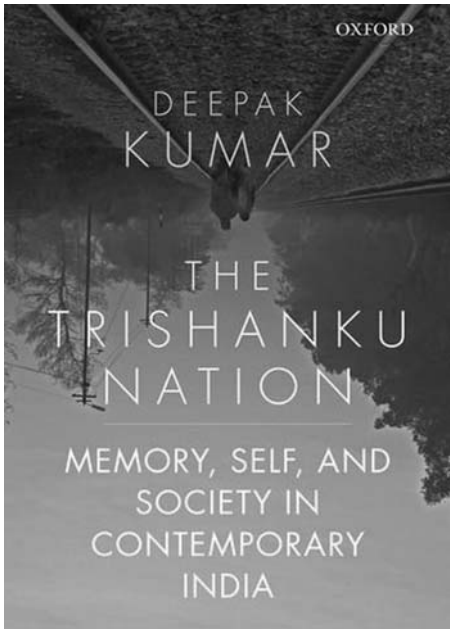
Between Tradition And Modernity

Jasbir Jain

THE TRISHANKU NATION: MEMORY, SELF AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA
By Deepak Kumar
Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 224, ₹495.00



I must confess I approached the book with some trepidation. With the media intent on giving us an overdose of mythology with an easy overflow into superstition and a larger than life visualization of religious icons, an intuitive response is to run away from all things connected with myth. But Kumar's *Trishanku* is located in autobiography, history and social analysis. Indicating a state of a divided being, it is metaphorically applied to an in-between state of non-belonging and uncertainty between the contrary pulls of tradition and modernity. The Indo-Canadian writer Uma Parameswaran has used the Trishanku image with reference to the diaspora for its conflict between affiliation and non-affiliation. Kumar locates it in the resident Indian and elaborates upon his intended meaning in the Preface: 'Suspended in mid-air, it refers to a situation in which one is neither elated nor too downcast', a situation applicable also to the history of the nation and its alternating forward and backward moves between progress and regression.

Despite this mythological reference point, Kumar—a historian both by training and profession—moves towards a very absorbing description of India in the early fifties, the years of his growing up. This allows him to move freely between feelings, situations, observation and experiences. The reader has to keep in mind that these are retrospective analyses shared by many a contemporary. The experiences of the 'mofussil' life holds its own charm of its rural landscapes and extended families. The young boy belonged to several households—his father's parents, maternal grandparents' and his maternal uncle's Patna family. Surprisingly the community he reaches out to works across caste and class. There is a remarkable degree of freedom for the young student who could switch over to subjects of his own choice. When I look back at those years, I remember that our parents also gave us this freedom for education which meant learning, opening out of the mental horizon, exposure and the ability to think on one's own—it was not dismissed as an exercise to be accounted for through marks, employment and material success.

The nostalgic fondness for the mofussil town soon gives way to a new experience

through a move to Patna, to an educational institution where the ability to speak and think in English had a priority over all else. Things perhaps have not really changed much in this respect despite the passage of five decades. It is at this point that the autobiographical narrative enlarges itself into the nation's history and the changes that were initiated after 1947 both in its social and political life.

The writer's easy, comfortable style draws one in, neither heavy, nor self-glorifying, it is both analytical and perceptive as histories are unfolded—the early democratic experiences, the power of the vote, the ease with which rightful voters could be kept away, the political idealism, the new message of socialism which failed to live up to its promise—all enter the narrative. Ironically, there is also a decline in educational standards and professionalism, difficult to account for. Before Independence there was a great deal of inner migration to good educational centres such as Lahore, Patna, Allahabad and many others. But gradually as this liberal policy of opening out to outsiders shifted, parochialism caught on, educational priorities also shifted.

The long chapter 'Knowledge and Education', heavily researched and documented is relevant to all educational and training programmes as it outlines the various stress levels and the failed reformative measures with great clarity and discernment. Other chapters on specific issues—economics and technology, politics and governments, the creeping corruption, interplay of power and the irresolvable tussle between religion and reason, follow. Kumar refers to a number of sources, often quotes from letters, newspaper articles and poetry. The poetic quotations, richly-laden with Urdu, evoke cultural memories of better times when values knit social relationships together.

The work can easily be seen as falling into three distinct parts—the personal, the politico-economic one, the social and the religion-technology debate. But these divisions are not marked; the transitions from one to the other are a natural gentle flow like the river waters. And these river waters consist of the journeying 'self'. Kumar refers to his many travels but is equally careful to mention that he saved money to do this. His regular annual visits to Calcutta (now Kolkata), the time spent in many libraries—the mofussil library with its many hidden treasures, the Patna Archives with its betel-stained walls, the National Archives in Delhi, the National Library and the Asiatic Library in Calcutta. It was not easy to negotiate their slow processes, their dust-laden volumes or badly organized systems or the load-shedding in Calcutta, except for Puja time, the rickety transport and the bad roads but finally this is how one learns. No arm-chair, internet learning. Here in the libraries one met senior scholars, peer group, interacted and debated with others and one picked up friendships.

Kumar's work deserves close reading for its perceptive analysis of the past. It is a work of social history and of the ways one can still persist in one's beliefs and manage to survive. He narrates without bitterness how the lack of a powerful patron kept him unemployed, how people on the verge of retirement sought their own extensions at the cost of future selections, practices of corruption which persisted and political interference in educational institutions. In the same vein he writes of his ten-year legal pursuit of rightfully earned arrears. These struggles hold up an example of optimism and hope in a world which opposes these.

The Trishanku Nation needs to be read by people who have grown up as his contemporaries as well as by the younger generation. It deserves to be read as social history and as relevant reference material for research in a variety of disciplines, especially history, education and pedagogical strategies. Refreshing in its candour and analysis, it is about the slow induction of modernity and an aftermath which is mixed. The traces of humour evident in the contrasts between the nation's lop-sided priorities they carry have a force of its own. A book that stands re-reading as it subtly points out the wrong turns taken and opportunities missed.

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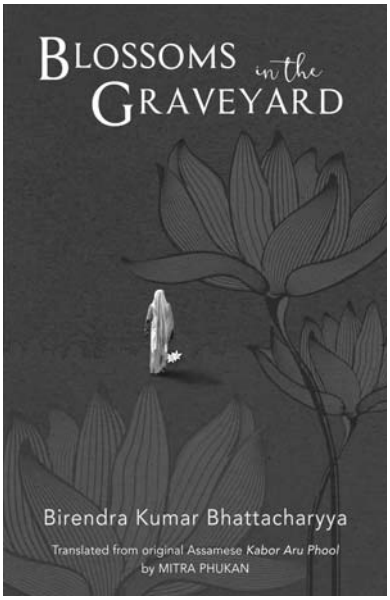
Story Based On Frontiers

Rita Kothari

BLOSSOMS IN THE GRAVEYARD
By Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya. Translated from the original Assamese by Mitra Phukan
Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 192, ₹295.00



Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's *Kabor Aru Phool* brought to us English-reading constituency by the meticulous translator, Mitra Phukan, transported me into a world of heroism, despair, bloodshed, violence, futility and hope—all at the same time. Situated in the tumultuous years of East Pakistan's struggle, mukti, from West Pakistan and struggle for self-determination, the novel provides a vast canvas of Partition and its continued ramifications experienced in the Eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. Drawn into this freedom struggle and the quelling, abetting, but also supporting, are various nations from the vicinity such as India and China as well as distant ones such as the United States. This complex and highly intertwined geo-political maze runs alongside human stories of several individuals—Dewan Amir Ali, the supporter of the Awami League, his wife, who was brutally raped and killed by the Pakistan army; the Brahmin girl Malobika raped and made insane; the feisty Amina who dies taking some of her perpetrators down with her; men such as Yaqub and Lutfur who maintain dignity in a highly masculinized world that produces and surrounds them; the ever-present but also often elusive Habi. If this is not intricate enough the narrator Robin Babu from Assam who is pulled out by the exhortations of his wife Maloti from a state of ennui and indecision into the world of political activism, and his intention to make Bagaitkar, the single-minded political activisit as the chief protagonist. Instead the men recede to make Mehrunissa the storyteller and the nucleus of all other lives, including that of the nation, converge. Robin Babu's tendency to take the wrong road, the one that is tortuous and winding, despite his best intentions to avoid it, are symbolically played out in his making Mehr the accidental protagonist and lending to this liberation struggle a highly gendered reading.

We are thrown into a maelstrom of events as Mehr begins to tell her story to Robin

Babu and Bagaitkar in the region of Phulbari, one of the many spots where Bangladeshis have sought refuge. The shy and undecided narrator Robin Babu manages to pull away the male voices, for it is precisely his own lack of certitude that enables him to hear other points of view, especially those of women in this novel, correcting as it were through narrative justice the atrocities inflicted upon female bodies during wars. The contrast between him and Bagaitkar (a less patient listener), one assailed by self-doubt and the other unwavering in his support 'to free Hyderabad from the Razakars, Goa from the Chinese, and the people in general from undemocratic practices and soaring prices' is sharp. (p. 7) Robin Babu on the other hand 'could not accept any religion, any mantra, any truth as being exact, accurate. It was nothingness. Only nothingness' (p. 7). Traversing through Garo Hills, they set out with provisions (more symbolic than real, like India's help at this stage) towards camps where Bangladeshis had taken refuge.

The novel lays bare the unspeakable horrors wreaked upon ordinary people by the army of Yahya Khan and exposes the bloodiest foundations upon which nations make themselves. The irony of Bangladesh's violence turned inward is not yet fully known, at this point of history. When one of the characters named Khansamah says, '… this quarrel between the Punjabis and Bengalis. In this clash between two mighty buffaloes we the Biharis are suffering' and wonders if independent Bangladesh would be good to the Biharis, the foreboding is clear. Meanwhile, Mehr, the abused one, the orphaned one, bears the wounds of the nation and is also reminded time and again to heal and do the healing; only to witness more as she goes along. It is she who becomes the voice of a past and present and as her story unfolds, we move from Assam to Kalihati and so on. We witness, with her, the destruction of her family, her village, and in breathless succession the death of anyone and everyone that mattered to her. Through these travesties Mehr draws upon faith, takes inspiration from the stories of Karbala, the namaaz, the songs, the anecdotes, and imagination of the Bangla community. More than anything else, she struggles to continue to believe in the existence of Khoda, Allah, who might punish her tormentors on the Day of Judgement. Imbued with Koranic references, her narrative is equally permeated by Hindu mythology and she represents a syncreticism that stands seriously threatened today. However, the persistence of male violence continues to anger her, shaking her faith every now and then in both spiritual fortitude as well as nationalism.

It is to the writer's credit that he avoids the danger of the singular narrative despite providing an unrelentingly violent glimpse of a patriarchal world. Mehr's encounter with men such as Yaqub, a Kathiawadi Memon from West Pakistan conscripted into war crimes, modify her experience of the 'other'. The stories of Yaqub and Lutfur complicate the assumed homogeneity of Pakistan, as does of course Bangladesh's own experience as East Pakistan. At what point does the feeling 'so what if we are Punjabis, we are also Muslims' prevail over a masculine nationalist discourse that Pakistan must survive and all those who threaten to destroy it must be slayed, regardless of their Islamic affiliation? Reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting', the novel provides many opportunities for individuals to encounter the 'other' and struggle with dilemmas of the self and duty towards the nation. Mehr is made to revisit her conclusions time and again, and it comes as a surprise to some, that she should find it in her to forgive. Expressed in rather banal words, note this, 'It seemed to Sameer that it wasn't Mehr who he was listening to, but to the words of Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi. Where did she get the strength to forgive this tyrannical, villainous enemy?' (p. 11) The steely characters of Mehr and Amina provide both the stark realism of violent histories of nationalism as well as its idealism. When Amina says, 'Forget all that. We are now daughters of Bangladesh. There are no such things as Syed-Hanifa, Shia, Sunni, Hindu-Muslim, Brahmin-non Brahmin, rich-poor. We are now all just "children of Golden Bangla, shonar Bangla"' (p. 128). The words pave a path for Mehr's own strength, who must rely increasingly upon herself and fight back. And yet the fact is that the feminized idea of the nation does little to protect its women, including Amina.

That being said, what are the blossoms in the midst of death and grief, which ties of affection, which belief in self, and what is the nature of empowerment emblematic in the title? It is best that the readers find that out for themselves and read this rich novel, made available for the first time in English. One may hazard a guess that the novel is constituted through multiple languages and not only Assamese, something of that flavour in the translation would have given to this story based on frontiers a texture.

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The Unseen Factor

Raji Narasimhan

BHOOLBHULAIYAAN AUR ANYA KAHANIYAAN
By Sara Rai
Surya Prakashan Mandir, Bikaner, 2015, pp. 144, ₹250. 00

The feel of English as an acquired but firmly interiorized linguo-culture is the defining element of this short story collection, *Bhoolbhulaiyan*, by Sara Rai. The intensity of this element, varying from story to story, is at its height in the title story, 'Bhoolbhulaiyan'. The tart speech, voice and manner of Kulsoom Baano, first person narrator, and main character of the story, are so vivid and ringing, their Urdu diction so rousing that an English articulation-cum-rendering of them springs up in the reader's mind on the heels of the Urdu-Hindi of the text.

The throw and sound junctions of the two languages differ. But they invoke each other, set off in the reader's mind by the non-unilingual spurs that come up there in the course of his/her close, sustained encounters and associations with English. 'A few words with you, please, with your permission' does not have the same invocative power as '*ijaazat ho to mai aapsey ththodee si baateyn karnaa chaahtee hoon*' (p. 68). The clipped, business-like tones of the one are far removed from the ceremonious politeness and *tehzeeb* of the other. But the original text itself is a vortex of linguo-cultures. The English dubbing or soundtrack that the reader supplies to it involuntarily is but an extension and reiteration of its inherent, multi linguo-cultural fibre.

The push and pressure of English are strong, not just at this particular point, but all through. It is writing resulting from the urge to play with time, to juggle with past and present: urge that gives individuality to the story and to the narrative energy behind it. The driving, shaping urge of this energy climaxes in the sections showing the narrator breaking into dance in step with the cadences of her song, her sister's singing emerging from the dark confines of the *ghara*.

The metaphorical substance of the story emerges vividly and dramatically in this vignette of sound and motion, of abstract and concrete. Stillness and motion—stillness in motion—the one in the other, the other in the one, constitute the warp and woof of life—the vignette says through its speech of non-speech.

This idiom of non-speech has been perfected in English—in the English of our non-English writers of English. The theme of a

disconnect deep within, characterizing Indo-English writing, has been given a period setting in *Bhoolbhulaiyaan*. The dimensions of time—past, present and a premonition of total non-presence in the offing, have been worked into the portrayal of the atmosphere in 'Noor Mahal', the ancestral abode of Kulsoom Bano, the physical setting of the story, its terra firma.

The Urdu diction that marks the language generally of the collection, makes its presence felt anew in this story. There is a finesse to the language, the feel of a striving to alight upon, vocalize, and set astir the pantomime come up in the entrails of the story, like a foetus.

'Far away, far, on some unseen shoreline of the world, Sakeena is singing, her face buried in the mouth of a *ghara*. Dusk has fallen. Gliding down the rose and gold sky Sakeena's voice is echoing in my ears. What a *mojizaa* (chance, happenstance) this too, that last month, stashed away in a recess of the wall I found my lost, eighty years old *ghungroos*. I took them into my hands, turned them this way and that. The same *ghungroos* they were, the same, only gone green with the mildew of time. With much pain I bent my stiff waist, tested it with my equally stiff hand, tied the bells to my feet, hard as wood. Then, with loose-jointed efforts like those of a big, clumsy bird, I did a pirouette. Something stirred in my mind, something rose to memory. From within the supine bells clinging to the ankles like vine, a dumb, smothered sound emerged. I felt that the bells were ringing far off in some other place' (p. 80).

There is a meticulousness in that passage, in its concatenation of the visual, aural and tactile elements of human experience. But that's not all. Urges to analyse and break up the affects comprising press the reader towards English vocalization. English seems a begetting language to the fine-tuning of recall and the particular feel of the fabric of memory that the combine of Urdu in the Devanagari script induce in the reader.

Take these lines, 'Don't know from where flooded into my breast this passion for dance. Was it the gift of none other than the dancing girls who came to the haveli every evening? Or did the roots of the passion stretch back and down to some deeper, really creative spot within me? Was it bequeathed to me from the genes of a dancing girl, a beautiful dancing girl who fed fragrant rolls of paan to a forebear of mine and took possession of his heart? From somewhere outside of me surely, had come this fever in my blood that could cool only with play of feet, of swirls of arms and body…' (p. 79 ibid.).

Whatever the shortcomings of that rendering, it does, at the very least, serve to draw the attention to the internal pulls and pushes—the undercurrents—of the narrating voice. It is a voice born of the querying, interrogative temper and attitude of our times, bred by our connections cum confrontations with English. The questioning stance, in its growth and development in our country, has a lot of English to its make- up, to its raison d'etre.

And it is this interiorized Englishness that flavours the prose quality of the story.

The Urdu-Hindi sound-lets of the text chime in his ears, carrying their speech substance. He wakes again to the author's painstaking, interpretative articulation of the aspects and moods evoked by the physical features of the scene concerned. And in an involuntary act of re-saying the said to ingest it better, he paraphrases the metaphors and similes to register afresh their impact. And this language of re-saying and re-articulation is often, even if not invariably, English (p. 78).

'*Merey chaaron taraf tanhaaee gaadey kaaley dhuyen kee tarah phail jaaatee hai…*' lines 3–4), he reads as the terms '*tanhaayee*' (loneliness), '*gaadey kaaley dhuyen*' (thick, black smoke), '*phail jaatee hai*', (spreads out) voice themselves in speech-sound and sense in the chambers of his understanding. English casts of the vernacular shape out of the sound/sense compound of the latter. They seem anterior: master texts, like Sanskrit.

Was it, wouldn't it have been, something similar for the writer? The similes have a markedly crafted quality to them: a disciplined precision in their usage and employment. The comparative term '*bemaqsad aankhon se nihaartee hai*' (eyes undistinguished by aim or purpose—blank of gaze) ingresses into the reader's sphere of comprehension in a slow, steady impetus: wakes him afresh to the transcribed feel of the writing, to the air of precedentedness about it.

We rule out Sanskrit. There isn't to this writing the sense and feel of antiquity, of timelessness, that Sanskrit evokes. Its cadences of thought and mind evoke a time period close to the present. What could this prototype language be other than English: a language that has passed into our sense of history, into the make-up and composition of our identity, as a result of our interactions with it?

English is the heard, unseen factor—the audio presence—of these stories in their Urdu-Hindi format.

Raji Narasimhan is a writer and translator.

Religious Radicalization And Socio-Political Conditions

Iymon Majid

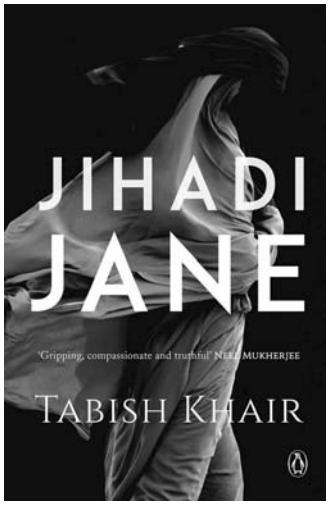
JIHADI JANE
By Tabish Khair
Penguin Books, 2016, pp. 237, ₹299.00

Is it imperative for a religious person to be nonviolent? If so, what should one then make of her politics or the society that urges her to take sides? What should one understand from the consistent scrutiny that she is subjected to because of her colour, ethnicity, and also her choice of residence? More importantly, when the question of religious radicalization arises, can we afford to divorce the socio-political conditions from the practices of such an individual?

Religions do not preach peace or violence, rather they provide a set of codes on which individuals rest their faith. The actions of the faithful actually lead us to where we set to judge the religion. *Jihadi Jane* engages with the question whether to judge religion based on its doctrines or the actions (practices) of the faithful. In the title, which is provocative and hard hitting, the book is self-explanatory. It is connected to Islam (Jihadi) and the West (Jane) apparently diluting any hint that there is any 'clash of civilizations'. But the story inside is quite different.

Tabish Khair, in his tumultuous journey of two women to 'freedom', offers the same analysis that different academicians and media offer to 'Islamic Radicalization'—that there is an inherent disconnect between Islam and the West. So long as Muslims continue to indulge themselves in a more 'orthodox' form of Islam, there cannot be sustained dialogue between them and the West. A practising Muslim like Jamilla is more prone to radicalization than Ameena's mother—a non-practising Muslim. Further Jamilla is unlikely to challenge the ISIS because she is an 'orthodox' Muslim by birth while Ameena became one at a later stage. Ameena will be the one to sacrifice herself for the larger cause. Khair's solution, which he drops in a very subtle way without emphasizing too much on it, is also a 'Western solution'—a Rumi solution.

If the lead character Jamilla believes in a stricter interpretation of Islam, her friend, Ameena goes through a transformation from



a non-practicing Muslim to being a wife of 'Jihadi' commander in Iraq. For us, for the readers or for anyone who is interested in the activities of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq and their western recruits, the case of Ameena is interesting. Unlike Jamilla who begins to detest the Islamic State for its orthodoxy and exclusiveness it is Ameena who abhors it for its violence and its love for terrorism. She cannot understand how a political group who uses religion for furthering its agenda can be cruel and questions the very logic behind such cruelty. She says with conviction, '…that is not what my Islam says. We cannot kill any innocent person and that too one who claims to be a Muslim' (p. 180). ISIS has employed the concept of 'Takfir'—an Islamic concept where a Muslim can pronounce a judgment on another Muslim about his faith. A deeply flawed concept in the sense that Islam does not allow Muslims to question the faith of other Muslims and this is where ISIS falters.

Jamilla's rejection of ISIS is more of her personal fight with what she believes and what ISIS wants her to believe. Thus she becomes agitated when ISIS burns Islamic books which they had deemed fit for reading but now were considered unsuitable since the writers or the schools of thought that had produced such books had spoken against the ISIS. She questions the segregation between men and women and has deep discomfort when such dictats are passed even at the time of emergency. Later, she learns that only 'beautiful' women are asked to marry Jihadis fighting in Iraq and Syria and the not so beautiful are asked to blow themselves up in suicide attacks, a terrible revelation that shakes her faith. But Jamilla, having problems with the methods and practices of ISIS is still willing to submit. Is she a coward or someone who goes with the flow of the events?

For a novelist, it is essential while developing the characters to know and understand their personalities. Jamilla is such a plain character that just after reading a few pages one anticipates what her next move will be. Ameena, on the other hand, is the ususal stereotype and essentializes the western perceptions of Islamism in general and ISIS in particular.

There are numerous instances where Khair has given in to the (western) propaganda surrounding ISIS. The stereotyping only proves the point: earlier in the novel, Khair tells of Ameena and Jamilla's respective Indian and Pakistani backgrounds. By then, it has already become clear that Ameena's parents are progressive while Jamilla's parents are conservative or as Khair puts it 'orthodox'. In other words, because of Indian secularism Muslims have become as what they have been portrayed in the novel and it is also how Khair, himself an Indian Muslim, wants the world to see them. Pakistani Muslims are a different case altogether. They are Zia's Muslims—one-dimensional, fanatic, fundamentalist and in a perpetual state of war with the western world.

The book plays on the stereotype concepts that Indian Muslims have of Pakistani Muslims: that they are more radicalized whereas Indian Muslims are secular, modern in outlook and can easily adopt westernization while Pakistani Muslims who relying more on their faith are radical, misogynist, fanatical and of course violent.

Then there is a moment in the novel when Jamilla consciously pits Rumi against ISIS. Thus there are two spectrums of Islam, one represented by the Sufis and other by Islamists led by ISIS and it is the former which is acceptable to the West. The Sufi debate is a thousand year old debate in Islam and has arguably received some of the finest scholarship. The West is endorsing the Sufis at this time because they seem to be apolitical. Rumi's philosophy will become politicized the moment it is read by a politically active individual. The debate on 'Islamic Radicalization' has to be understood in a political context rather than a culture-religious context.

Adding on the stereotypes that Khair so remarkably puts in his book is the theory of hymenoplasty. For him, Jihadis need virgin brides, which in itself is a comment on western values and Islamic values. A serious discussion on virginity will lead us to the conclusion that virginity as a matter of pride is an Arab issue and not necessarily an issue Islam or Islamists are concerned with.

Since the book is about the radicalization of Muslims living in the West, it inevitably gets linked with the value systems that the Muslims living in the West have adopted. In the context of the book, he seems to be confusing radicalization with religiosity because he sees it through the value system so cherished by the West. Further, if joining ISIS is a form of radicalization among the Muslims of the West then isn't it the failure of western value system? With so much propaganda and literature available against the ISIS and for such Muslims, why would they join a war with a certain death that too in a 'developing' country? Khair fails to answer such a question and goes for a trivial explanation.

Consider this; the narrator cites many reasons for Ameena's 'radicalization' but it is obvious that she had heartbreak from someone who would always be the 'other' when a moral high ground is taken. Earlier in the novel, when Ameena talks about her father's love affairs, the *'otherness'* is more apparent. Her mother's fear that she should not become westernized and is comfortable with her going to the mosque reflects the same *othering* attitude. But does it mean that Muslims in the West cannot grapple with western civilization and thus reject it? Khair's simplistic explanation of heartbreak does not answer this question. Break-ups are so normal in any society and it would be futile to assume that Muslims in the West do not go through these personal relationship tumults. Does every one of them join ISIS? Certainly not! Further, it is not just born Muslims who have joined ISIS but recent converts also have been lured by the group.

There is much more to learn about ISIS to understand why Muslims as well as non-Muslims find them so addictive. The politics of the western world and their lookalikes in the rest of the world post-Russian occupation of Afghanistan answers this question more vigorously. There is no apparent rejection of western civilization or their values but a refusal to believe that the value system of the western world can dominate them or tell them to monolith themselves according to their perceptions. Someone like Khair cannot answer such a question because he belittles the role of the state in promoting conflicts. Novelists often engage with such questions and answer them amicably. Khair is betraying his own profession and the readers, particularly when he makes generalizations like 'Islamists cannot smile' (p. 194.) It just means he does not consider them human and feels conversation with 'Islamists' will be futile, notwithstanding the fact that ISIS is not Islamism. If an engagement is fruitless, all that a scholar or a novelist can do is not to demonize them. To a large extent Tabish Khair does succeed in doing just that.

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Haunting Vistas

Rohini Mokashi-Punekar

THE VALLEY OF FLOWERS: AN ADVENTURE IN THE UPPER HIMALAYA
By Frank Smythe
Speaking Tiger, 2015, pp. 261, ₹299.00

Recently Speaking Tiger has launched a new series that attempts to bring books published roughly between the late 19th and the latter part of the last century to the modern-day reader. Named eponymously 'The Ruskin Bond Selection', the books in this series are specially hand-picked by Ruskin Bond and give a glimpse, as it were, into this well-loved author's bookshelf. Anurag Basnet, the editor of the series, has said in an interview with *The Hindu*, '…because many of these are books Bond would have read in his childhood, they definitely come from the previous century, which is why some of the books have a definite Raj flavor.' Proven bestsellers of their times, they share in common a certain excellence in writing and a timelessness which, asserts Basnet, have been the principal criterion in their selection.

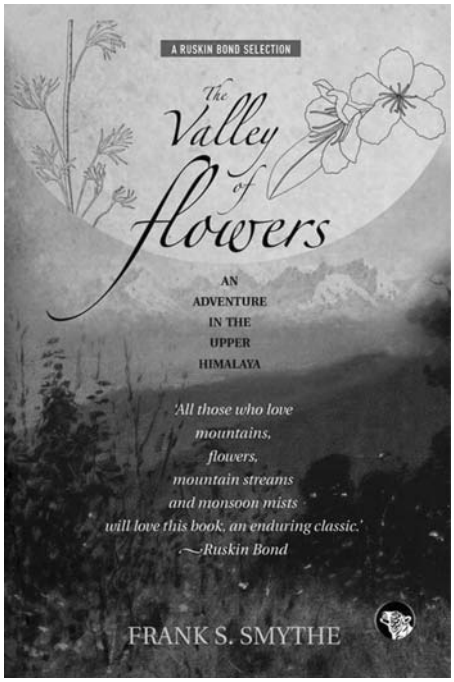
'The predominant note was peace' begins Frank Smythe in one of his evocative descriptions of the grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas in *The Valley of Flowers*, which may well describe this reader's principal response to his book. Bond himself dedicates the book to 'All those who love mountains, flowers, mountain streams and monsoon mists.' In an odd kind of a way the book enables an Indian reader to understand why the Himalayas have always figured as a refuge and an abode, to which the many gods and rishis headed in Hindu mythology and imagination in their search for meditative calm. Its heights and the solitude of its open uninhabited vistas seem peculiarly suited for the contemplation of the mystery of life, positioned as the yogi may have been, miles from and above the messiness of human emotions and strife.

Frank Smythe, a British mountaineer and botanist, began his mountaineering career in the Alps. He was one of the first climbers to attempt the Everest, preceding Mallory and others. The book under review, however, is an account of four happy months which he spent 'amidst some of the noblest and most beautiful mountains in the world.' This long sojourn was the result of a discovery which was made by a mountaineering expedition, of which he was a member, climbing the Kamet in the year 1931. The party was lost in a thunderstorm. However, after some time, the rain and mist cleared and they found themselves in view of a valley with meadows full of flowers in colours of all hues. It was Bhyundar Valley and they christened the place 'The Valley of Flowers'. Finding himself haunted by the beauty of that sight, Smythe found an opportunity to form an expedition to the Himalayas in 1937. The present book is an account of his return to the Valley of Flowers and other expeditions during this visit.

While Smythe and a fellow mountaineer scaled the Nilgiri Parbat and the Mana Peak during the four months and attempted to climb Mount Rataban, these periods of sustained physical activity are interspersed with days of leisure. Smythe spent days wandering in the Valley of Flowers, identifying and collecting flowers and seeds in the cornucopia surrounding his camp. As a romantic in love with this natural habitat and the simplicity of the mountain folk living in the Garhwal region, he is blessed with an endearing capacity to enjoy leisure. Consider the following paragraphs:

> During the morning I lounged about the camp. It was a morning like other mornings, quiet and seeming scarcely to breathe. Dew lay thick on the flowers; birds sang in the forest and the air was sweet and charged with pleasant smells.
>
> I reclined on a bank below the camp. Presently a gentle breeze began to blow, touching the flowers with light fingers. Smaller flowers such as the blue corydalis quivered a little but the taller flowers, the white anemones and golden nomocharis, nodded in slow undulations, as though conscious of their grace and beauty.
>
> During the afternoon clouds gathered; building up slowly, column by column and mass by mass. There was a wild sunset with fingers of lurid light but, as usual, evening established equilibrium in the atmosphere, and the stars shone out in their thousands as night spread from behind the ashen snows of Rataban.
>
> We were very content. I knew the men were content because they used often to sing their simple Tibetan melodies.

Evocations such as these are the very balm to a sedentary reader who may tend to feel exhausted from the other kind of descriptive accounts in the book interesting as they often are: those of intensive mountain climbing, involving tremendous grit and an enduring capacity for adventure.



Much has changed in the physical and political landscape of India since the first print of this book came out almost a century ago. The Garhwal region and even the upper reaches of the Himalayas are certainly not as pristine as they once were. It is wonderful therefore to be able to see them in the mind's eye through Smythe's brilliant descriptions of the Himalayas in different moods and slants of light.

Even as one is swept along by spectacular visuals lovingly painted by the author, one cannot but be struck by the fact that Smythe's relation with his Tibetan and Gurkha porter-climbers is, understandably, unencumbered by any modern notion of political correctness. He is compassionate, and frankly admires their physical endurance; however there is no doubt of his perception of them as 'Oriental': a word which he uses often. The book is an Englishman's account of a European expedition. It is the several hardy 'natives' who comprised a significant part of this adventure that hold our wondering attention today.

Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, is the author of *On the Threshold: Songs of Chokhamela* (Altamira Press 2005 and The Book Review Literary Trust 2002), *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon* (Manohar 2005) which she co-edited with Eleanor Zelliot, and *Vikram Seth: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press 2008). She is currently engaged in translating medieval Varkari poetry from the Marathi, an anthology of which will be published by Penguin in their Black Classics series.

Differing Values

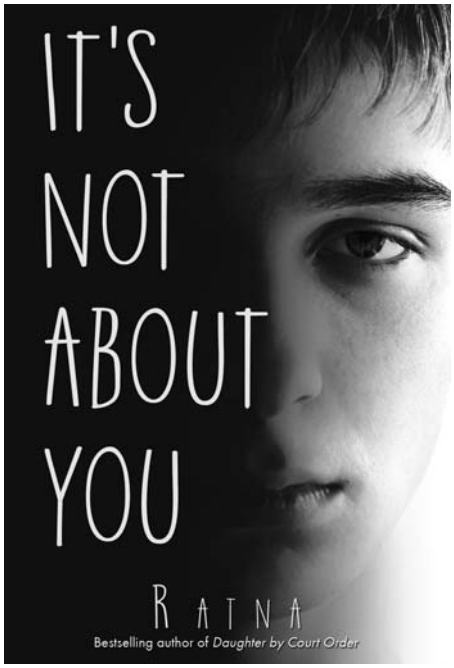
Shyamala A. Narayan

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU
By Ratna Vira
Pan Macmillan India, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 328,
₹299.00

Ratna Vira is a human resource and communications professional, with a master's degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science, as well as an M.A. in English Literature from St Stephen's College, Delhi. *It's Not About You* is her second novel, after *Daughter by Court Order* (2014). Set in Gurgaon and Delhi, *It's Not About You* reveals the dark side of an elite school: the Principal chooses to ignore bullying because the perpetrators are rich and powerful. Samaira, a single mother of two, is a successful woman in corporate India, but her world falls apart when Aksh, her sixteen-year-old son, is brutally beaten up at school.

Aksh remains in a coma for three days. When he recovers consciousness, he mutters disjointed words—'A girl . . . in school. Find Peasant P. Ask her.' The novel takes on shades of a detective story because he suffers memory loss—he cannot remember what happened that day. The school is quite uncooperative—they feel that their duty is over after sending him to hospital. Sammy, on her part, like other parents, had assumed that her responsibility was over after getting Aksh into a 'good school'. 'That a good school was like Aladdin's lamp with a genie that would, at the end of grade twelve, deliver a perfect child with perfect marks . . .' Sammy tries to talk to his old friend Jay, but she learns nothing except that Aksh was moving around with Kushal. She realizes that his friends are afraid to talk. The novel shows how bullying breaks the spirit of the victim—it takes very long for Aksh to stop blaming himself, to open up and tell his sister Tara the reason why his grades were falling.

Sammy has worked out a friendly relationship with her husband Rishi, who moves to London after the divorce. Her daughter Tara, now twenty years old, has gone to England for her college education, and is with her father. Rishi is presented as a positive character, whose love for his children makes him take up arms against bullying, 'using the government, the police and the legal system'. As he slowly recovers from his physical injuries, Aksh reveals the full extent of his misery. Kushal is the leader of the gang of bullies; his father is a powerful politician, who ruthlessly cuts down anyone who crosses



his path. When Kushal and his friend Dadlani are put in the same section as Aksh, they beat and threaten him; he loses the will to oppose them, and does nothing when they ill-treat Jay, who has been his friend from the time they were in pre-school together. The novel presents a frightening picture of a school tolerating bullying just because the perpetrator is rich and powerful. The school authorities say, 'We suspended a boy the other day for biting a kid. There were no witnesses, there was no bite mark but the principal took the victim's word for it.' The next sentence reveals how hollow these claims of imposing discipline are—the 'victim' comes from 'such a good family. A rich businessman with a bungalow in Amrita Sher-Gill Marg' while the boy who was suspended was 'from a slum near the school'. The novel reveals the ill-treatment of poor children who have been admitted under the RTE quota.

Tara too has faced bullying, in another form:

> I was in junior school and the other children would tease me because my parents were separated. They would chase me around in class shouting, 'Tara has no father . . . where did her papa go?' I used to be in tears but they would continue teasing me. . . .

Sammy asks her daughter why she never told her, and Tara replies, 'You looked so worried all the time and then your mother would call and shout and you would cry. I did not want to add to the problems, Mama.' Tara says, 'Thinking about my grandmother only makes me cry. Always shouting and blaming us for her misery.' We learn that her mother has always ill-treated Sammy, preferring to pamper her brother. Her sister-in-law Lola changes sexual partners as frequently as she changes her designer handbag, telling her high society friends that her husband, Sammy's brother, is good for only one thing—signing cheques. The mother here resembles Kamini of Ratna's earlier novel, *Daughter by Court Order*, who pretends that she does not have a daughter so that she can inherit a larger share of the child's maternal grandfather's property. Like Aranya, the protagonist of the earlier novel, Sammy is loved and supported by her grandfather. *Daughter by Court Order* had autobiographical echoes. *It's Not About You* is different; it was inspired by a newspaper report about a young American who stepped across the racial divide to protect a fellow high school student, and ended up in a coma.

Another area of corruption Ratna exposes is medical treatment, with the patient being sent for unnecessary tests.

Sammy and Rishi find many poems when they look through Aksh's iPad; the poems do not have much literary value, but they throw light on the teenager's psyche. Sammy's character is delineated in depth, and Rishi's love for his children is heart warming; however, Sammy's mother is depicted as too evil to be true. Each of the 51 chapters has an epigraph, but this technique adds nothing to the novel. *It's Not About You* is very readable, we keep turning the pages to see what happens next, even as we realize the complexities of the mother-child relationship.

Shyamala A. Narayan is Former Head, Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi.

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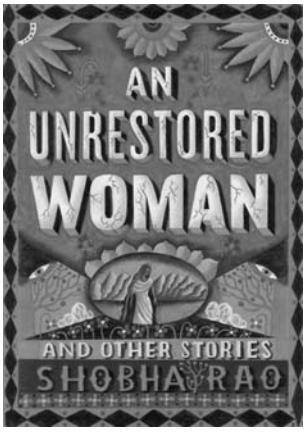
A Stark Dozen

Dipavali Sen

AN UNRESTORED WOMAN AND OTHER STORIES
By Shobha Rao
Virago Press, an imprint of Little Brown Book Group, London, 2016, pp. 244, ₹399.00



Colourful and ornate covers, but starkness within.

In the Author's Note, Shobha Rao provides the context of the stories, namely, the Partition of 1947. She also makes it clear that the term 'unrestored woman' refers to abducted women described under the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration Act, 1949), as 'recovered'. Her point is that while recovery of a person is possible, restoration is not.

Twelve stories, beginning with 'An Unrestored Woman'.

Neela had been married at 13 to 24-year-old Babu, a tea-vendor in trains commuting between Amritsar and Lahore. But at fifteen, she knows only a sense of loneliness and un-lovedness,

Those were the days of Partition. One such day, Neela's village gets the news that the train which Babu had been seen boarding at Bagha, had been ambushed and torched by Muslims. A village elder named Lalla gets Neela's mother-in-law a bottle of poison, and takes away Neela's gold mangal sutra. 'What good were two women, two widows, alone in this world?', Neela's mother-in-law says and dies peacefully in her sleep that night, inviting her daughter-in-law to do the same. But Neela does not drink the poison. Lalla arranges to send her off to a Camp for Refugees and Un-restored Women, East Punjab'. Neela meets Renu, also widowed and of the same age as herself. Renu and Neela discover the joys of companionship and closeness. But Babu, still alive, tracks Neela down and brings her back to their own, old home. He says, 'I'm glad I found you', and Neela, for a moment, feels her sense of un-lovedness recede. 'That's the only way Lalla would give the mangal sutra back.' Even though he makes love to her that night, Neela feels herself unloved again. She had been recovered from the camp but realizes that she would never be restored. She finishes off the poison she had hidden away.

The next story 'The Merchant's Mistress' is about Renu. The two stories form counterparts of each other and this is the format of the book. Successive stories are linked or connected although the second is not exactly a continuation or sequel of the first. It is more of a contrast or counter-example.

Renu's husband is killed by a Muslim mob and she lands up in the same refugee camp as Neela. She travels through Chandigarh and Delhi with the Indian government's gift of twenty rupees and a pair of chappals. Arriving at Ahmedabad, she has to serve both a diamond merchant and his wife—as a lover. Eventually the opium-addicted merchant tells Renu of a short visit that he was planning to the diamond mines of South Africa. Renu packs his pipe with lethal amounts of opium, steals his papers and valuables, and boards the boat the merchant is due to board. With short hair and a voice she had deliberately deepened, Renu travels in luxury to Durban, perhaps to become a 'restored' woman.

'The Imperial Police' has Jenkins, a head constable in Rawalpindi, wondering about his subordinate Abheet Singh making him sloppy salutes. After Singh is killed in a riot, Jenkins learns that Singh had an injured arm which was difficult to move past the shoulder. And yet he had managed to join the imperial police, and on a day when Jenkins had had an attack of nerves, had soothed him down by gently holding his hand.

'Unleashed' carries Jenkins forward in time as a doorman in the U.S., but behaving with the same grace as his subordinate in Rawalpindi had shown.

'Blindfold' shows the prostitute Bandra building up a brothel in the outskirts of Peshawar and keeping young girls in windowless cells, 'blindfolded' from the world outside. But one of her girls—Zubaida—patiently and cleverly makes a hole in the wall and conceals it under a wall-hanging. Establishing this connection with the world outside emboldens her ultimately to punish Bandra and escape.

'The Lost Ribbon' is the chilling story of an Indian mother killing her baby daughter born of a Pakistani father. In her childhood she had been robbed of a ribbon she had treasured. Now it is as though she had been deprived of her heart as well as her mind.

In 'The Opposite of Sex', Mohan is sent by the Indian Geographical Society to survey a region in order to finalize the India-Pakistan border that was being drawn up. Starved of sex, he falls in love with a buxom village belle. But the girl's father who has lots of land does not heed Mohan's appeal for his daughter's hand. To force his hand, Mohan tampers with the measurements which makes the man's lands, along with those of some others, fall within Pakistan. This defeats Mohan's purpose as the man commits suicide and the affected villagers get enraged. Mohan's boss Alok Debnath, who had the congenital peculiarity of having six fingers on one hand, comes down to investigate the matter. The mob descends upon both, killing Mohan. 'Such A Mighty River' describes how the sixth finger came to be chopped off, that too by kidnappers. It would be sent with the ransom note to his daughter, as proof that he was really in the power of the kidnappers.

'The Road to Mirpur Khas' is about the journey of a couple from riot-ridden Jaisalmer heading towards Mirpur Khas beyond which lies Karachi. In that long desert-like stretch, the only refuge they find is Arun's Restaurant and Bar, the stop for passing lorries. This story has its counterpart in 'The Memsahib' which is about how Arun's restaurant came to be opened

'Kavitha and Mustafa' covers the story of a train from Pakistan into India being besieged, looted and torched. Two people—a Hindu and a Muslim, a young married woman and a nine-year-old boy orphaned by a Hindu mob are getting down and trying to escape by road. Although he survives, young Mustafa never spoke again. In 'Curfew', he is a grandfather, silently remembering Kavitha perhaps.

Powerful stories, unforgettable stories, all of them. Almost after 70 years since they may/must have happened, they chill us still. But are they about the unrestored woman in India, or Pakistan, or any specific country? Are they even about women specifically? All over this globalized yet torn-apart world, people—men, women and children—are experiencing 1947 again and again. Even now, perhaps this very moment, they are going through what this book describes.

So the title of the book is a little limiting to its scope.

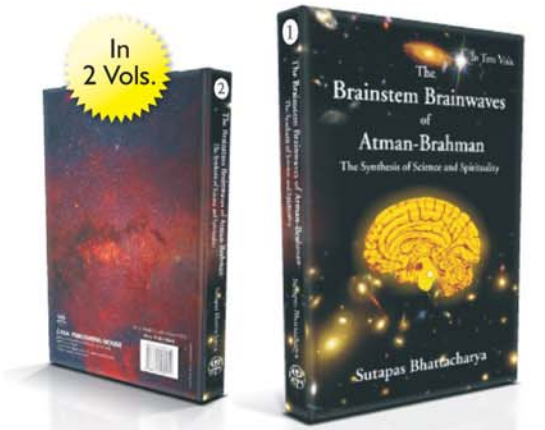
Simple but accurate, the Glossary is likely to be useful for those unfamiliar with Indian terms. A little information on the author herself would have been useful.

Dipavali Sen is an Associate Professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi, Delhi.

The Brainstem Brainwaves of Atman-Brahman

The Synthesis of Science and Spirituality

—Sutapas Bhattacharya



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- **Vol. 2:** ISBN: 978-81-212-1283-0 (**Price:** ₹ 925)

This remarkable book undermines both the Physicalist-Materialist ontology of Science which imagines Consciousness to be a latecomer in material evolution as well the Theistic mythology of most religions which imagine a man-like God distinct from Nature and Humanity. It also resolves definitively the central problems of Eastern and Western philosophy.

It makes fools of many of the most famous Western scientists and philosophers who have tried to reduce Consciousness and Spirituality to fit in with their Materialist preconceptions using magical notions such as 'Emergence'. It explores the 'Politics of Knowledge' exposing how Western academics and New Agers continue to peddle White Supremacist myths which conflate 'European' with 'Scientific' and give false credit to 'Ancient Greeks' and modern Westerners for Indian inventions. It shows how Western scholars of Religion fear the threat of a Universal Spiritual Philosophy based on Hindu-Buddhist NonDualism and thus peddle false myths denying a common core Universal Mysticism (or 'Perennial Philosophy') that underlies the myths of seemingly divergent religious traditions. It also shows how the metaphysical interpretation of Quantum Theory leads to the same Transcendental Reality & Nonlocal Wave Structure underlying Matter (and the so-called 'Laws of Physics') revealed by Yoga.

The Author: **Sutapas Bhattacharya** (www.sutapas.com) was born in India in 1964 but has lived in London since 1967. In 1986 he graduated with a First in Molecular Biology (London University) with prizes for top student in Biology. Having published a metaphysical paper arguing for Panpsychism in 1983, his real ambition was to explain Consciousness as Science could not do so. In 1994 he identified the physical correlate of the Divine Light (*a.k.a.* Pure Consciousness, *Atman*, Godhead etc.) with the brainwaves of the Reticular Activating System. This epoch-making discovery undermines both the Physicalist-Materialist ontology of Science as well as all Theistic religions. It also resolves definitively the central problems of Eastern and Western philosophy; i.e. the real meaning of Mystical Union and the Ontological Status of Consciousness. His 1999 book showed how the physical phenomena of Science as well as Consciousness and mystical phenomena, inexplicable to Physicalist science, can be integrated by grounding Science in a truly universal metaphysics based on Universal Consciousness and its energetic vibrations. It received remarkable plaudits from scholars familiar with Science-Mysticism interrelations (See quotes on www.sutapas.com/testimonials.html)

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The Book: The Divine Light (Pure Consciousness) is central to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam/Sufism, Platonism/Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Hermeticism. It is the Universal Spirit within us. With masses of evidence drawn from scholarly sources, this book demonstrates how the archetypal spiritual experiences underlying religious myths are explained scientifically based on the true scientific explanation of The Light and of enlightenment. This overwhelming evidence provides the 'Authority of Evidence' which, combined with rigorous argument, allows the author to repudiate famous Western thinkers including Nobel laureate scientists in regard to Consciousness and Spirituality. Dominant Western academic myths denying the possibility of unmediated, mystical knowledge of the Transcendental Realm underlying natural phenomena are undermined along with the West's false pretensions to Universality. In so doing the author exposes the Institutional Racism of Western Academia which peddles Eurocentric and White Supremacist myths about 'Ancient Greeks' and the History of Science and refuses to take seriously non-European metaphysics. In establishing the One True Ontology, not only does this book truly integrate Science and Spirituality, Eastern and Western philosophies etc. but it also demonstrates that 21st Century Science actually resembles Ancient Indian metaphysics rather than the invalid, Anthropocentric myths of 'Ancient Greek' and Modern Western philosophers.

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