

RE-MARKINGS

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RE-MARKINGS

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EDITORIAL

Some died in neglect, others in the midst of every attention. No remedy was found that could be used as a specific; for what did good in one case, did harm in another. Strong and weak constitutions proved equally incapable of resistance, all alike being swept away, although dieted with the utmost precaution. By far the most terrible feature in the malady was the dejection which ensued when any one felt himself sickening, for the despair into which they instantly fell took away their power of resistance, and left them a much easier prey to the disorder; besides which, there was the awful spectacle of men dying like sheep, through having caught the infection in nursing each other. This caused the greatest mortality... On the one hand, if they were afraid to visit each other, they perished from neglect; indeed many houses were emptied of their inmates for want of a nurse: on the other, if they ventured to do so, death was the consequence. This was especially the case with such as made any pretensions to goodness: honour made them unsparing of themselves in their attendance in their friends' houses, where even the members of the family were at last worn out by the moans of the dying, and succumbed to the force of the disaster ... Men now coolly ventured on what they had formerly done in a corner, and not just as they pleased, seeing the rapid transitions produced by persons in prosperity suddenly dying and those who before had nothing succeeding to their property. So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honour was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honourable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all alike perishing; and for the last, no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little. Such was the nature of the calamity...

The impact of this passage cannot be lost on anyone who saw and experienced the devastating effect that the merciless COVID-19 unleashed upon mankind. The lines cited above provide a graphic account and appear to have been extracted from a recent reportage. Yet, readers will be startled to know that they come not from any

contemporary news desk but from *The History of the Peloponnesian War* penned by Thucydides some 2500 years ago. The amazing parallel that we observe in the two situations, despite a span of 25 centuries separating them, compel us to understand that epidemic, pestilence, natural calamity, pandemic and the like are an integral part of the human experience and that they are always universal as well as contemporary.

It is true that survivors refuse to draw any lesson from the past or present and love to continue to cherish the illusion of immunity from disaster. They tend to forget that if life is all about hedonistic pleasures, it is also about restraint about how we conduct ourselves as a member of the social community. To make a mockery of protocols like 'social distancing' and wearing a 'mask' only shows how insensitive we can be to feelings of compassion for others.

The near and dear ones who have been snatched away from our midst will never return. The doctors and health workers who have lost their lives so that others could live deserve all our gratitude. Our obligation to them all cannot end with merely our prayers for the peace and rest of the departed souls. We need to take it as a collective responsibility to contribute our very best to ensure that no one feels alienated and segregated again on account of our lack of empathy and concern for our fellow men, women and children no matter from what class, caste or region they come from. To all those who used the pandemic as an opportunity to grow rich and affluent overnight by hoarding medicines, Oxygen gas cylinders and the like, I wish to remind them of a statement made by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*: "Do not pursue what is illusory – property and position: all that is gained at the expense of your nerves decade after decade and can be confiscated in one fell night. Live with a steady superiority over life – don't be afraid of misfortune, and do not yearn after happiness; it is after all, all the same: the bitter doesn't last forever, and the sweet never fills the cup to overflowing.

Before closing this editorial note, I deem it an honour to thank all the contributors who have enriched this volume with their presence. I also deem it a privilege to dedicate this edition of *Re-Markings* as our salutation to all the medical scientists in the world who have done their very best to make the planet pandemic-safe by giving us the vaccines at a pace that is simply incredible.

Nibir K. Ghosh
Chief Editor

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THE MYTHOLOGY OF IMPERIALISM AT 50: A CONVERSATION WITH JONAH RASKIN

Nibir K. Ghosh

Jonah Raskin, former chair of the Communication Studies Department at Sonoma State University, U.S.A., is the author of fourteen major books that include: *The Mythology of Imperialism: Joyce Cary, E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, D.H. Lawrence* (1971); *Out of the Whale: Growing Up in the American Left* (1973); *Underground* (1978); *My Search for B. Traven* (1980); *For the Hell of It: The Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman* (1996) and *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl' and The Making of the Beat Generation* (2004). In the late 1960s, he taught English and American literature at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and for most of the 1970s he worked as a reporter, a journalist and an editor at *University Review*, a monthly magazine of politics and the arts. As a Fulbright Professor in Belgium, he taught American literature at the University of Antwerp and the University of Ghent. He serves on the advisory board of Re-Markings and is a regular contributor to the journal. He visited India in March-April 2017 to deliver the Keynote address at the international conference on "Peaceful & Prosperous South Asia: Opportunities & Challenges" organized by JIIT, Noida from 27-29 March 2017. He also delivered a talk on "American Literature" organized by ELSA in collaboration with Re-Markings at Agra on March 31, 2017. This conversation focuses on Jonah Raskin's epoch-making book *The Mythology of Imperialism* that has reached the 50-year milestone of its enduring popularity in 2021. In his unique style, the author shares his views on various issues and concerns related to Imperialism that went into the making of the book and their continuous relevance in contemporary times.

Ghosh: Heartiest felicitations Jonah on your magnum opus, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, reaching the half-century milestone of its first publication by Random House in 1971. How does it feel being the author of a book that has seen fifty years of existence in a rapidly changing world?

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**AN EVENING TO REMEMBER:
E-LAUNCH OF 20TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL
NUMBER, 18TH MARCH 2021**

Sugata Bose

First of all, may I congratulate Professor Ghosh and everyone associated with Re-Markings on the publication of this wonderful 20th anniversary celebratory number. It was very good to hear Jonah Raskin and Anita Auden Money. It is so wonderful that Re-Markings has had special issues on Doris Lessing and W. H. Auden. No historian of the 20th century can afford to not cite W. H. Auden. He has a brilliant poem on every major historical event to have occurred in the last century including, of course, on partition which Ayesha Jalal and I quote in full in our book *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*.

The 18th of March is of course a red-letter day in South Asian history. On March 18th 1944, the Indian National Army moved into North-eastern India towards Imphal and Kohima. With "Chalo Delhi" on their lips, the Azad Hind Fauj crossed the Indo-Burma frontier and carried the armed struggle for liberation onto the Indian soil. They marched singing their battle song *kadam kadam badhaye ja*. Step by step they would advance until the Indian flag fluttered over the red fort of Delhi. On that historic occasion, Netaji issued a lyrical order of the day in which he dwelt on the theme of sacrificial patriotism:

There, there in the distance – beyond that river, beyond those jungles, beyond those hills lies the promised land—the soil from which we sprang—the land to which we shall now return. Hark! India is calling! India's metropolis Delhi is calling! three hundred and eighty-eight million of our countrymen are calling. Blood is calling to blood. Get up, we have no time to lose. Take up your arms. There, in front of you, is the road that our pioneers have built. We shall march along that road. We shall carve our way through the enemy's ranks or if God wills, we shall die a martyr's death. And in our last sleep we shall kiss the road that will bring our Army to Delhi. The road to Delhi is the road to Freedom. Chalo Delhi!

***Sugata Bose* is Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University, USA.**

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IF YOU DON'T KNOW ME BY NOW...
BLACK LIVES MATTER

E. Ethelbert Miller

Too many metaphors are missing these days. In their absence, we desperately search for a way of explaining the sudden upheaval in our society. We uproot the past looking for historical clarity. Unfortunately, the future often wears a mask. We are no longer protesting like this is the '60s.

The motion of history has taken us somewhere else. "Where are we?" is as difficult to utter as "Once upon a time." As writers, our own words and narratives (if we are not careful) can turn against us, and even become suffocating.

In 2020, our profession urges us to place our shoulder against the soft back of Democracy and push. Thanks to Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, the Black Lives Matter movement was created in 2013 with a hashtag in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman's murder of Trayvon Martin. It was a movement that demanded protection of black lives as well as space and equality for women, queer, and trans people. By 2014, the death of Mike Brown, an eighteen-year-old black man killed by the police in Ferguson, Missouri, brought more attention to the blue climate warming of brutality against the black community. People did not feel safe when they left their homes, they were also afraid when they decided to return. Is it different this time, or more of a changing same? The poet Sterling A. Brown wrote about police and mob violence during the 1930s and 1940s. His words of caution still echo what every black mother fears.

They got the judges
They got the lawyers
They got the jury-rolls
They got the law
They don't come by ones
They got the sheriffs
They got the deputies

E. Ethelbert Miller is a literary activist and author of two memoirs and several poetry collections. He is based in Washington, D.C.

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A CONVERSATION WITH ANITA AUDEN MONEY

Nibir K. Ghosh

Anita Auden Money was born in Calcutta during the last days of the British Raj to John Bicknell Auden – an eminent British geologist who worked for the Geological Survey of India until just after Independence – and Shiela Bonnerjee – a Bengali painter and the granddaughter of W. C. Bonnerjee, first President of the Indian National Congress. After reading English at Oxford and with Art as an interest, she has been preoccupied with various academic and literary engagements. She has worked for the poetry magazine *Agenda* founded by William Cookson. She is interested in poetry, literature and critical debate and writes occasional memoirs and reviews. Till February 2020, she worked as an administrator in an inner city London comprehensive and is currently doing some voluntary tutoring with Action Tutoring. Being half English and half Indian, she is a perfect instance of the East-meets-West paradigm. She is interested in social issues and education in its broadest sense to include cultural life and heritage and to encourage students to appreciate their own diverse cultures as well as the Western culture where they are being educated. She considers it a privilege to be the niece of W. H. Auden, one of 20th century's greatest poets. In this conversation, she talks at length about her varied experiences and about the life and poetry of her uncle.

NKG: It must be a privilege to be connected to W. C. Bonnerjee, the first president of the Indian National Congress through family lineage. Please share some of your impressions pertaining to this historical connect?

AAM: My mother Sheila and her sisters Minnie, Anila and Indira, often called the Bonnerjee sisters, spoke of their grandfather as Grey Beard. They did not really know him but were well aware of him. My mother's aunt (on her father's side), Agnes Majumdar, has written a memoir which describes both her father W. C. and mother Hemangini and the time spent in England in a house in Croydon. There is also another slim memoir jointly written by Agnes and Sadhona Bonnerjee with a foreword by N. B. Bonarjee (another branch of the family) and preface by Protap Bonnerjee, my mother's brother. It is interesting to read about his early life and his decision to go to England, forfeiting his father's approval and breaking with tradition by crossing the black water.

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**MICHELANGELO GOES TO ISTANBUL: ENARD'S
*TELL THEM OF BATTLES, KINGS AND ELEPHANTS***

Rajesh Sharma

This tale of Michelangelo's three-month sojourn in Istanbul is told by the audacious French novelist Mathias Enard whose fecund imagination inhabits the vast Mediterranean region where east and west meet in nuanced intimacies. Enard has studied Persian and Arabic, writes in French, and has taught in Europe and the Middle East. He is no alien to otherness; his roomy French prose can happily host a Hafez lyric. The beguilingly tell-tale title *Tell Them of Battles, Kings and Elephants* – drawn from Rudyard Kipling's *Life's Handicap* – doesn't quite tell the tale. The sliced off fragments of Kipling's sentence (which appears as the epigraph to the book) are stitched into a new unity over silences to lure the reader into a world long gone. But as soon as the reader walks in, he discovers that the writer is drawing him deeper, after an injunction disclosed in the tail of Kipling's sentence. "But omit not," it says, "to tell them of love and suchlike."

And so Enard tells what history does not. Of inner, private lives, by re-creating their elusive reality through invention fired with imagination and breathing into it until it breathes truth. Out of a few bare facts and some artifacts, which he lists at the end, he conjures the substance of this slender novel. The language is muscular and delicate, firm and suggestive. Enard is a wizard of silences. He knows how to tell without having to write.

Michelangelo Buonarroti is barely thirty. To sleep, he does not lie down: the posture is too death-like. Yet an artist must know death. It will set him free from the last fear and grant him, also, wholeness.

So he would rip open unclaimed corpses as did Leonardo da Vinci, who is said to have repainted, two decades later, Monalisa's neck, believing he had a better grasp now on necks and faces and the hidden paths lighting up in the mystery of smiles. During his sojourn in Istanbul, Michelangelo will keenly watch an execution. And he will dimly see in the darkness of the night the murder of the woman who secretly loves him but who has been coopted in the plot to kill him. He will stare long at the spreading pool of blood until the body is removed. He has watched her dance and heard her sing, but he has not really seen her until now.

Dr. Rajesh Sharma is Professor and Head, Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala.

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**THE BLISS OF THE ‘INWARD EYE’:
A BIRTH-CENTENARY TRIBUTE TO
SATYAJIT RAY**

Nibir K. Ghosh & Sunita Rani Ghosh

*Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing
in the world without seeing the sun or the moon. –*

Akira Kurosawa

‘Truth is beauty, beauty truth,’ wrote John Keats at the end of his “Ode On a Grecian Urn” after advocating ‘Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter’ in his immortal poem. In the context of Keats’s poem, it is right to presume that truth, no matter how bitter, when manifested in any artistic garb becomes an artefact of beauty. Even in these dreadful times when the entire globe is engaged in coming to terms with death, decay and destruction, wrought by the ravages of the COVID-19 reality, a film like *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road) or *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu) can make us understand that the human struggle for existence and survival against overwhelming odds and calamities is not a rarely occurring phenomenon but is part and parcel of the ever-ongoing narrative of human existence. These films do not offer an easy escape from reality like mainstream Bollywood stuff where drama, dance and song transport us to a world filled with euphoria where everything ends in imagined happiness.

As art-film addicts, we have always been a great admirer of Satyajit Ray movies. We have watched with relish most of his films that brought him national acclaim as well as international renown. We have enjoyed with immense aesthetic delight most of his creative renderings on celluloid including *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished, 1956), *Apur Sansar*, 1959), *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964), *Aryaner Din Ratri* (Days and Nights in the Forest, 1969), *Pratidwandi* (the Adversary, 1970), *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971), *Asani Sanket* (Distant Thunder, 1973), *Sonar Kella* (the Golden Fortress, 1974), *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (The Chess Players, 1977: his first Hindi film), *Sadgati* (Deliverance, 1981), *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World, 1984), *Ganashatru* (An Enemy of the People, 1989), *Agantuk* (The Stranger, 1991).

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**YE MERA INDIA: CONCEPTUALIZING THE WEST,
HOME, AND BELONGING IN POPULAR
HINDI CINEMA**

Urvashi Sabu

Hindi cinema has long captured the imagination of the Indian people. It has fashioned and has been fashioned by the trends, ideas and ideologies in currency at any given time in the history of the nation. It has mirrored the social and religious upheavals and changes in the fabric of India, as well as articulated its political and economic tensions and developments. It has not stayed untouched by the emerging, and now influential, forces of globalization. Cross cultural stimuli and the intermingling of races and creeds have been material for its themes. The emigrant experience, never alien to the Indian consciousness, has also found expression in Hindi cinema; whether it is in the form of people who have settled in foreign lands due to compulsions of profession, livelihood, and familial forces, or just plain wanderlust. Yet, in comparison to its creative cousin Literature, which has succeeded in portraying the Diasporic experience in realistic and relevant shades, popular Hindi cinema continues to depict the West not just as a polar opposite of the East in terms of values, but also treats the West as a space where ambitions may be fulfilled and dreams realized, but which can never be considered 'home' in the emotional and cultural sense of the term. This idea of the West as the Other has been a recurrent symbol in main-stream Hindi cinema right from the early post-independence decades up to the present, even when globalization and advancements in communication and information technology have blurred not just geographical but also cultural boundaries.

'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet', has been an oft quoted adage in popular culture in India. This polarity is vividly visible in Hindi films. However, more than the geographical or cultural impossibility of the East meeting the West is the *moral* polarity that separates the two. The West in Hindi films is frequently viewed as morally loose, lacking the values that are coveted and deemed desirable for the Indian. Manoj Kumar's *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970) portrays the Sharma family residing in England as completely anglicized; their son Shankar (Rajendra Nath) is a hippie, and their daughter Preeti (Saira Banu) not only smokes, drinks, and wears mini-skirts, ...

Dr. Urvashi Sabu is Associate Professor in the Department of English at PGDAV College, Delhi University, Delhi.

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**NATIVE/NON-NATIVE DIALECTICS:
MYTHS AND FOLKLORE IN THOMAS KING'S
*THE BACK OF THE TURTLE***

Charu Mathur

Folklore comprises a body of traditional beliefs, customs and stories expressed and handed down generations largely by word of mouth and forms the unofficial, non-institutional knowledge and experience of a community. Myths are a part of folklore that are often sacred narratives usually placed in primordial time and are generally associated with faith and religion. Though coloured by epithets like 'old', 'exotic', 'untrue', 'outdated' and 'dying out', they continue to be an active part of human existence and understanding. These customary ways of thinking and behaving form the heart of all cultures and connect the people to their past, play a significant role in the present and sustain a relevance to the future. Canada's indigenous First Nations' people have had their own folklore and beliefs that helped them to make sense of who they are and of the world around. Located in pre-historic times and transmitted orally these beliefs were primarily communicated through stories that have existed before the comparatively recent existence within the containment of the written word and through literature.

The American-Canadian writer, Thomas King, who hails from the indigenous Cherokee community recurrently probes the Native culture's deep ties to storytelling in his works. Like the mythic stories that governed the lives of people in First Nations' cultures King's novel *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) weaves together tales from different times and places. Myths that are either unique to the indigenous communities or have Judeo-Christian origins come together to form a narrative whole that traces the trajectory stories take to shape lives and determine the manner of understanding and relating to the world and its people. The novel's mythic interventions enter, probe and reframe the Native/Non-native social, cultural and political formations.

The narrative of the *The Back of the Turtle (TBT)* creates a magical yet devastated world where a man-made environmental disaster Kali Creek has destroyed all sea life, killed the First Nations people living on Smoke River Reserve and most of the inhabitants of Samaritan Bay who ...

Dr. Charu Mathur is Associate Professor in the Department of English at University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

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TRADITION AND DEVIATION: THE WOUNDED SELF IN BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S NOVELS

S. P. Swain & Ramani Ranjan Panigrahi

Self is an agent for the thoughts and actions of individuals to which they are ascribed. As a psychological phenomenon it endures through time and different moments of life. Thus self is manifested in the conduct and discourse of an individual. As an identity, self is a fact of experiences, an incorporated spiritual principle through body, life and sense organs in spatio-temporal and psycho-physical existence. J. F. Lyotard rightly observes: "No self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations" (149). So self becomes a pluralistic term and it is always in a state of flux. The shaping up of self depends on the social status, gender, education, upbringing, emotional history, race etc. In the process, it confronts inexorable personal, emotional, behavioural, economic, religious and political factors. In case it fails in the strife, self alienation takes place. But alienation in Bhattacharya's novels is not social exclusion; albeit his novels exemplify through the alienational experiences of the characters, the ethical values in human relations within the family and the community. Above all, Bhattacharya portrays a painful sense of alienation from a socio-economic and socio-psychic perspective. It is a condition of the inability of self to accommodate with the situation, resulting in disenchantment and discontentment. This self estrangement makes a person stranger to himself. He loses his essence and he is in quest of an authentic selfhood. Paul Edwards defines alienation as "an art or the result of the art through which something or somebody becomes (or has become alien or strange) to something or somebody else" (Edwards 76). It is a condition of powerlessness, meaninglessness, harmlessness etc. The cause of the loss of self is due to its incompatibility with outer social demands. The self of a person is inextricably enmeshed in an infinite chain of beings with the socio-psychic matrix. As a dynamic and multi-dimensional entity, self finds it intricate to come to stipulations with the social web in the modern era.

Dr. S. P. Swain, former Principal, Gandhi Mahavidyalaya, Rourkela, Odisha and former Honorary Professor of DAMITS, Rourkela,

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**DIVAKARUNI'S *THE FOREST OF ENCHANTMENTS*:
A FEMINIST VERSION OF THE *RAMAYANA***

Gunjan Chaturvedi

“For you haven’t understood a woman’s life, the heartbreak at the core of her joys, her unexpected alliances and desires, her negotiations where, in the hope of keeping one treasure safe, she must give up another.” (Divakaruni, *The Forest of Enchantments 2*) This is how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s Sita blurts out, when Valmiki presents the manuscript of his *Ramayana* to her with a desire for approbation. The arduous effort of the scribe fails to satisfy Sita. She points out certain empty spaces in his narration. Enamoured as he was of the men in his epic, Valmiki had allowed very little space to Sita except as the iconic, ideal wife of the *maryada purushottam* Ram. The focus was on the splendour of the mighty hero of the patrifocal society; the silent, nourishing, enduring strength of the female protagonist had been relegated to a negligible secondary role. The *Ramayana* was only that – a paean of Ram, an encomium of his muscular triumphs, a panegyric on his conquests and accomplishments. Sita accuses the epic of being androcentric in nature and asserts that the ascetic has overlooked the intricacies of her life. Valmiki suggests that she should herself pen her story and fill the literary crevices of the *Ramayana*. The sage provides her with quills, a writing table and pounded leaves and sets the stage for Sita’s internalized journey into her selfhood.

When Sita unlids the inkpot, what she feels is not a sense of amazement or surprise but of familiarity. The colour chosen for the tale is – Red!!! – “the colour of menstruation and childbirth, the colour of the marriage mark that changes women’s lives, the colour of the flowers of Ashoka tree under which... (she) had spent... (her) years of captivity in the palace of the demon-king.” (2-3) As she prepares to commence her tale, some clamouring, tentative, whispering voices – of Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Surpanakha, Mandodari, Urmila – start ringing into her ears, exhorting her, entreating her – “Write our story too, for always we have been pushed into corners, trivialized, misunderstood, blamed, forgotten – or maligned and used as cautionary tales.” (3)

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REDEFINING PROGRESS: PERPETUAL DILEMMA BETWEEN SELF AND SOUL IN THE MODERN AGE

Abha Sharma

Has modern age not become too convoluted and light deficient? Certainly so, if the prevalence of pervasive depression and dilemma gripping societies the world over are anything indicative of. It has made people lose a sense of life's perspective. All sections of society are equally affected by its trauma. Despite the economic prosperity with all technological advancements, the socio-cultural contradictions have continued to bedevil them. In the hectic drive to be businesslike and monetarily practical, recourse to excessive profiteering without social perspective has led to a complete breakdown of life's equilibrium. With the ever-increasing dependence on technology, the finer human sensibilities have been fast disappearing, affecting lives adversely, especially when man's creative interactions are becoming increasingly uncommon. Though technology has opened newest vistas of development contributing to the material prosperity, it has also directed mind to be self-centric and increasingly incoherent with heart, often thrusting people in shadowy relationships. Consequently, there is a tangible disconnect and a lack of feelings of belongingness among people. Arguably, the universal sway of people by the technology in twenty-first century has not helped man win peace internally and externally.

At a time when more importance is accorded to industrial growth and mercantile intensification, the business ideology oriented towards more and more profiteering has influenced the thinking of a wide cross-section of people, including clergy and educationists. They pattern their activities on the ideals of Mammon. The modern literature depicts the present-day dilemma of worshiping both God and Mammon and establishes that both cannot be embraced simultaneously. Mammon implies external glory, which works at cross-purposes with God's divine ways to sustain the moral order for the overall good. The eminent American dramatist and thinker Eugene O'Neill, through his play *Dynamo*, proffers the viewpoint substantiating the rift machine has created between individuals. Its uniquely woven theme involving modern myth of the machine, coupled with the concerns of humanity embodied...

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**REDISCOVERING THE INDIGENOUS IDENTITY:
A STUDY OF LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S
CEREMONY AND EASTERINE KIRE'S
SON OF THE THUNDERCLOUD**

Riya Dutta & Seema Singh

Introduction

TemsulaAo, in "The Old Story Teller," writes: "Grandfather constantly warned/ That forgetting the stories/ Would be catastrophic:/ We would lose our history, Territory, and most certainly/ Our intrinsic identity." (Ao 27-32)

These lines can be seen as symbolic of the two texts chosen for the study and the journey undertaken by the protagonists of the novels to re-discover their indigenous identity. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* traces similar kinds of themes despite being part of two different literary scenarios. The term 'rediscovering' implies that the distinct cultural identities of various indigenous tribes are lost somewhere in contemporary society.

The paper analyzes the protagonists' trajectory through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'Minor Literature.' It focuses on how the three characteristics of the Minor Literature are projected in the texts, which creates what they call 'revolutionary' in terms of the texts' position in a particular cultural hegemony. The representation of the local cultural histories becomes part of their cultural identity. The alienation in contemporary society urges them to re-discover the indigenous identity which provides them a sense of belonging. Their resistance and suffering culminate in the preservation of their distinct identities.

The paper foregrounds the reading of the texts and the commonality of both the texts through the notion of Indigeneity and as part of the minority discourse. The concept of minority here is relational, and it is determined by the position in which they survive. In *Kafka: Toward the Minor Literature*,

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**ECOLOGICAL UNDERCURRENTS IN
BARBARA GOWDY'S *THE WHITE BONE***

Ashoo Toor

Nature is often depicted in opposition to the urban sphere, forming a contrast in ethical terms. Questioning anthropocentrism goes much beyond an academic exercise; it involves much more than merely debating the dominant cultural motifs of placing humans at the centre of material and ethical concerns. Surely the dominant beliefs, values and attitudes guiding human actions constitute a significant driving force behind the pressing problems of our day.

There has been an absence, from literary theory, of the organizing questions of moral philosophy, and of moral philosophy's sense of urgency about these questions. True knowledge comes not from mere observation but from thinking and feeling. We can, thus, try to re-define our view of and relationship with, the non-human. By including the emotional, the sensuous, the mystical and the instinctual, we can construct a much richer reality about the non-human world than can be had through the merely observational and utilitarian. Through the representation of the non-human in literature, as it happens also in films and other media, there is a possibility of accessing a different understanding of them which may bring us to more compassionate attitudes emanating from the processes of identification involved in reading. That is why, according to Copeland, "literary animal studies need to explore why it is that literature stimulates us to identify with, and care about, and want to help, characters not ourselves, not even human and how the functioning of the imagination currently figures into animal-centric literary theory and into animal studies as a whole" (94).

Barbara Gowdy's novel, *The White Bone*, is constructed on this peculiar tension of imparting to animals, which are, strictly speaking, characters in the loosest sense of the term – their real selves – in order that they are made credible for what they are, and not as vehicles of a moral fable. However, Gowdy keeps the basic frame of the beast fable unaltered; her characters – who are elephants – are capable of communicating among themselves, engaging in discourses, con-structing a stratified society and harbouring a quasi-Biblical framework...

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**EXPLORATION OF DALIT
SOCIOLOGICAL LIFE AND
FEMINISM: BAMA'S *KARUKKU* AND
*SANGATI***

Pramod Kumari

According to K. Satyanarayana, "Dalit Autobiography is one of the important forms Dalits have used in a creative manner to address issues that the social sciences and humanities failed to address. The selective recognition of this form by the publishers should not blind us to the fact that Dalit autobiography is one of the great contributions of Dalits to the literary world." (JLA 9 15-19) It is the central genre of Dalit literature. Daya Pawar, Laxman Gaikwad, Laxman Mane, P. Sonkamble, Baby Kamble, Kumud Panwade, Mallika Amar Sheikh, Mohandas Nemi Sarai, Omprakash Valmiki, Prem Gorkhi have written their autobiographies or made self-portraiture of ordinary people in literary language. It is a new kind of aestheticism.

Mini Krishnan of the Oxford University Press, which published the translation of Bama's *Karukku* in 1998, says autobiographical narratives still have their place. The real life accounts of Dalits are so important to the politics of the movement and the truth about the country that it stirs the Dalit in all of us. We need to hear those stories. For that section of Dalits who have gone beyond the pain of psychological damage and sense of grievance, perhaps these autobiographical accounts are even something of an embarrassment but most publishers (and all of them are upper caste and nearly all of them women) instinctively feel that that is where they must begin.

Tamil writer Bama's autobiography *Karukku*, published in 1992, is the first of its kind to appear in Tamil, for Dalit writings in this language has not produced many autobiographies. 'Karukku' means palmyra leaves, which, with their serrated edges on both sides, are like double-edged swords. By a felicitous pun, the Tamil word 'Karukku', containing the word 'Karu', embryo or seed, also means freshness, newness. In her foreword Bama draws attention to the symbol, and refers to the words in Hebrew (New Testament), ...

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THE 'FORM' OF MOURNING: READING JULIAN BARNES'S *LEVELS OF LIFE*

Sahajmeet

In 2008, Julian Barnes's wife, Pat Kavanagh succumbed to cancer, thirty seven days after diagnosis. The writer, extremely reserved about his private life, made no public statement of his grief. In 2013, five years after the death of his wife, Barnes published *Levels of Life* (2013), a meditation on death and grief.

When Barnes started writing this book, he intended to write about ballooning and photography, treating these as metaphors for magic and truth respectively. But he did not know it would turn out be a book about grief. *Levels of Life* has a tripartite structure of linked narratives; the linking is unconventional. Each part begins with a hypnotically repeated image of putting together of two things that have never been put together before. And the consequence is that the world is changed. People may not notice this at the time, but it doesn't matter, the world *has* changed (1). This is true not only about love but also about art. The remark can also be seen as an observation on the juxtaposition of three different literary genres in this work as Barnes's unusual effort to understand and write about the human condition with utmost lucidity. The book has three parts: a biographical essay about ballooning, a short story about love, and a grief memoir. These might appear to be distinct narratives at first, but they gradually merge into a whole that defies all literary forms.

Barnes chooses to refer to his works simply as 'books'. On a number of occasions, he has asserted that he does not consciously think about form when he writes; so intensely does he work that the form emerges from the innate logic of the writing. *Levels of Life* is a notable exemplar of his unconventional writing.

Levels of Life is more than a grief memoir about the death of the author's wife in the sense that it not only mourns a death but is also a profound meditation on grief as a part of the human condition. Apparently, Barnes finds it difficult to express his feelings in the literary forms inherited from tradition.

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FANTASY LITERATURE: A CHILD-CENTRIC APPROACH

Insha Iftikhar

Over the centuries Fantasy fiction has found a comfortable niche in children's literature, even used synonymously with it outside academia. With a targeted audience i.e. children, storytelling becomes a more conscious act of creation. Having acquired the subtleties of children's literature, the genre has adapted to the needs and experience (or we can say lack of experience) of the young audience. Writers are aware of the power of fantasy and it is now known that tales can subtly affect the reader's belief system and the understanding of the world around. Fictional tales offer a sensitive play of motives, desires and human limitations; the reader is pushed into the distinct experience offered in the book. He/she is forced into an escape from his/her own situation into a different world. The experiences and circumstances of a newly introduced character(s) are more engaging than his/her own circumstances.

Rita Felshi, in the book, *Uses of Literature* (2008), talks about this ironic experience of the reader in which he/she travels out of his/her self into a new fictional world, finally arrives at a renewed understanding of the surroundings. Felshi says "[R]eader [becomes] absorbed in the scripts that confound their senses of who and what they are. They come to see themselves differently by gazing outward rather than inward, by deciphering in mark on a page." (28)

Parents and educators have always been looking for the methods by which the young minds could become actualized and resourceful for the society. Since direct moral summoning in schools and living rooms is ineffective, it is avoided. Instead of the summoning, the story is used for this purpose. For the young, the literary text does not act a 'mirror', reflecting the self, since the sense of identity is still at its infancy. The story acts like a 'lamp', lighting their path as they move towards a more responsible life of adulthood. Joseph Boone says about the enchanting effects of a story in *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and Shaping of Modernism* (1998), "[The reader experiences] absolute powerlessness, enacting the intense human desire to let go – to be released, to yield to an 'other'." (Quoted in Felshi 54)

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THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IN SHOBHAA DE'S *SPOUSE*

Santosh Kumar Singh

It is quite evident that the women protagonists of Shobhaa De's fiction challenge the well-established age-old institution of marriage and also try to deviate from the norms of healthy conjugal life. It will not be unfair to define the women protagonists of Shobhaa De as free birds roaming in the garden of Mumbai inhaling the fragrance of pleasure without caring for the value-based system of the Indian society. Shobhaa De has been hailed as the 'Queen of Indian Fiction' while, for many, she is merely the 'princess of pornography' and 'sweet queen'. Born of Maharashtrian parents in Satara in 1948, she received her early education in Delhi and then moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) when her father got transferred to this mega city. She is a typical product of the city which she has observed not only as a place but also as a peculiar pattern of life which Mumbai provided to her.

It is interesting to note that Mumbai is the locale of all Shobhaa De's novels and they begin with the letter 's', as, *Sisters* (1992), *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Snapshots* (1995) and *Second Thoughts* (1996). In most of her novels, Shobhaa De has projected the picture of women which is different from the traditional one. Her views on women can also be seen in her non-fictional works which include *Uncertain Liaisons* (edited with Khushwant Singh), *Shooting from the Hip*, *Surviving Men*, *Selective Memories: Stories from My Life*, *Speed Post* and *Spouse: The Truth about Marriage* (2005).

The institution of marriage occupies a significant place in any society. This is a very basic issue of life which has drawn the attention of the most enlightened people of the globe. Since this institution is closely linked with the progress of the world and the civilization, Shobhaa De too has given vent to her thoughts regarding marriage in various works through various characters, situations and expressions. Therefore, she is much concerned about the collapse of this institution, an anxiety which she has expressed in her works. With her own experience of two marriages and observations of the outer world, Shobhaa De came across pleasant as well bitter memories of married life.

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READING AMIT CHAUDHURI'S NOVELS IN THE LIGHT OF RĀJAŚEKHARA'S *KĀVYAMĪMĀSĀ*

Shivali Garg

This paper briefly explores, on the basis of theoretical and critical possibilities offered by Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṣā*, the nature and quality of Amit Chaudhuri's writing. It particularly considers Chaudhuri's peculiar artistic creativity, his practice of writing and various levels of prowess as a writer, the literary devices he uses and his phraseology and syntax. Thus the critical perspectives afforded by Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṣā* (ranging from questions of the writer's ability and practice to the potential of literary language) are explored with the help of suitable examples from Chaudhuri's fiction.

Kāvyamīmāṣā is a composite analytical framework about the writer and his artistic creativity. The work can be considered a practical treatise for an aspiring literary artist because it instructs him about conceiving, composing, practising, and critically analysing *kāvya*. *Kāvya* means a sentence qualified with *gunas* (technical excellences) and *alamkaras* (figures of speech). It includes all forms of literature under the rubric of art. Issues such as poetic genius, poetic maturity, intonation, desirable and undesirable forms of art, unacknowledged borrowing of words and meanings and rhetorical conventions are treated with a rigorous critical analysis in *Kāvyamīmāṣā*.

Rājaśekhara emphasizes the centrality of *pratibhā* (innate faculty) to the making of a great literary work. He defines *pratibhā* as "a power that illumines in the poet's heart the store of words, the assemblage of meanings, the paths of utterance, the mechanism of the figures of speech and other necessary materials" (*Kāvyamīmāṣā* 9). An artist endowed with *pratibhā* can perceive even non-present objects with extraordinary imaginative power. On the other hand, a person lacking in *pratibhā* does not notice even the obvious things. For instance, in the novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* Chaudhuri describes *godhuli* in a way that demonstrates his outstanding *pratibhā*. Sandeep knocks on the bathroom door, as his uncle sings, to ask the meaning of 'godhuli':

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PSYCHOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT IN MONICA ALI'S *BRICK LANE*

Asma Rafiq & Alisha Chaudhary

Sangeeta Handa writes, "The dichotomy between the 'material body' and the 'psychic being' makes diasporic consciousness a 'region of shadows, indicative of a mentality, an inherent condition of the psyche.'" (Singh 171) The said quote aptly sums up the novel *Brick Lane* written by Monica Ali. Ali's novel falls under the category of diasporic literature as it narrates the experiences of immigrants. A good number of diasporic Indian writers have been preoccupied with a sense of transcending boundaries by virtue of their exposure to the West. A feeling of 'spiritual statelessness or rootlessness' has gone hand in hand with a re-reading and re-defining of cultural identity with nostalgic memories of rootedness to native sensibilities. Alienation and identity crisis are the dominant themes in their work. Most often it is found that people from developing countries migrate to developed countries. These migrants are mostly scientists, engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and writers. Ultimately, what happens to these migrants? Are they accepted in the countries of their domicile? Do they achieve their goals of migration? Emmanuel S. Nelson defines the Indian diaspora as the "historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian subcontinental origin in other areas of the world" (Mandal 37). The paper aims at discussing these issues that are projected in *Brick Lane* through the lens of migration and multi-culturalism in a postcolonial setting.

Before going in detail about psychological effects of migration, let us try to look at the reasons that are related to migration. The first question that comes to mind is that why people leave their birth place and move to a foreign land. We know that the common aim of migration is to improve one's future prospect through education and work. After decolonization many people from Third World moved to the West in order to lead a life of more comfort. Here, it must be noted that in migration context, there are push and pull factors that can be economic, environmental, social and political.

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WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF INHUMAN SOCIAL REALITIES IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE BENGAL

Emily Pandey

Introduction

The society which was essentially male-oriented and male-dominated was hostile to women and made women slaves to men. Evil social practices and customs, ignorance and superstitions which were the social realities in those days not only caused distress to women but also maligned the Bengali social life. Patriarchy controlled the society and so male-dominance was the order of the day. Subordination of women to men was an anti-feminist and anti-individualist custom that degraded women's position and status in the society. Women did not have any social distinct identity. They were repressed and inhumanly treated; they were undervalued as having no ability to contribute to social life and social development; they had to pass their life through rigorous distresses. The society was cruel to them. They were "sexually colonized, historically neglected and biologically subordi-nated" (*The Wise Women*, 4:2, June 21, 1982).

Conservative Outlook of People in the Patriarchal Society of Bengal

Autobiographies of Sarala Devi, Manada Devi, Suprava Dutta, Amodini Dasgupta, Saroj Nalini Dutta, Nistarini Devi, Kamini Roy, Mankumari Basu and others have depicted the society faithfully and exposed the degradation of women's life and position in the society. They have highlighted conservative society and condemned the mores, superstitions and irrational taboos curbing women's right and freedom as human beings. They castigated the male attempt to keep women behind the purdah and were pained to depict their despair and uncertainty of life. Sarala Devi denounces the rigid and unsympathetic attitude of the society to women in her autobiography *Jibaner Jharapata* (The dropped Leaf of Life). Manada Devi portrays the loss of women's honour and dignity in the patriarchal society of Bengal in her autobiography *My Kaifiyat* (My Explanation). Suprava Dutta depicts the sad and damaging effects of polygamy on women in her "Diary" and shows that marriage for women lost its significance and value in the polygamous society of Bengal.

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POETRY

Tuncay Gary

THE THEATRE IS BEING DEMOLISHED

stone by stone
the curtain falls
props swept away
set apart
cut short and small
the make-up of
actor
away
costumes ripped off
down to the skin
deducted
thrown naked on the street
with curses and abuse
thoughtful
Rain sets in
storm thunderstorm
everything is washed away
even the memory of it

FAURÉ, SATIE, DEBUSSY AND RAVEL

slumber next to each other
in a big bed
one foot hits the other
a hand on the face
or on the other's stomach

It's raining outside
droplets splash and splash
at the window

The four gentlemen in unison
breathe in and out
in and out
in and out

The piano in the room unused
notes are lying around
confused

If someone wakes up now
and plays
what music will we hear

REACHED THE MIDDLE

the middle of the booklet
of life maybe
maybe right in the middle
to have lost yourself
suddenly
get off track
with yourself and with everything
by means of the other
but still in the middle
to be
mediate and mediator at the same time
but now see
the middle
gets too much symbolic power
and make friends
with first
and last words

TO BE EXPOSED ON AN ISLAND

with Shakespeare
to be or not to be

A few lines
from Hamlet
from other pieces
in the mouth
in the ears
quite numb
cross the island
and be safe
one is alone

During the day and also at night
dialogues
about this or that monologue
it was necessary
killing Desdemona
what is Jago in our time
and Ophelia
not Hamlet went mad
but still
M.O.A.I. is my choice

- **Tuncay Gary**, born in Kars (Turkey) and based in Berlin, Germany, is film and theatre actor, poet, playwright, director and dramaturge. He excels in plays by Goethe, Shakespeare, Molière and Cervantes as well as in productions by contemporary authors. In 2015 he founded the literature workshop and the theater workshop for children and young people from the socially disadvantaged environment to enable them to learn to love the language. As an actor, he has been committed to human rights for years.



Cyril Wong

DIARY ENTRY

I recognise the same nurse
behind the procedural ear-loop
mask: her eyes bearing
news I can read
as well as her kindness.
The ventilator
I have taken selfies with
has been a friend of mine,
closer than any coronavirus
I hope I will leave today,
along with the sedation,
that breathing tube,
body aches
and dreams of elsewhere.
This room has a window
with a view of other windows
to other lives
I can only guess
are freer than mine
for now. Even behind her mask,
I know she is smiling.
Negative twice in a row
is the only positive
result we need.
She nods. I want to hug her
but know I can't.
Then when she exits —
you'd think I'm crazy —
I turn to face
the ventilator now
and give a grateful little bow.

- **Cyril Wong** is the Singapore Literature Prize-winning author of poetry collections, *Unmarked Treasure* and *The Lover's Inventory*. He has also published *Ten Things My Father Never Taught Me and Other Stories*, and a novel, *The Last Lesson of Mrs De Souza*.



Deena Padayachee

GAUNTLET

I saw a dog with white hairs and pink skin
attempt to cross busy, frenetic, non-white, narrow Randles road
early that morning... near where Barnes road meets it,
Not far from Charles Hugo primary school,
Dr Pather's surgery and Sydenham pharmacy.
My attention was riveted by its old head,
its terrified face:
Fear enclosed it, permeated every hair.
As my car slowly approached, it looked for a second at me.

Please God, spare me this torture.
I do not want to look at myself
in the manacled, cold, granite, segregated university,
in the minefield of Apartheid laws and restrictions,
the tyrant's maze of obstacles, traps and terror,

I remembered my uncle's face in Pinetown
As a huge, uniformed, brassy white policeman
bore down on him...
like a giant crocodile bearing down on a shackled deer.

The hound looked the other way, went forward a little, stopped,
as a roaring, death-dealing truck blasted past his nose.
He knew that in this world he is weak
And the strong kill orgasmically.

Then he bounded over to safety, and I breathed a sigh of relief.
I prayed that my friends and I would also survive the Apartheid gauntlet.

- **Dr. Deena Padayachee** is a medical specialist based in Durban, South Africa. He has been awarded the Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer and Quill awards from literary organisations including the English Academy of Southern Africa and the South African Writers' Circle. His writings have been included in Anthologies published by the University of Cambridge Press, Penguin, the PEN international journal and Kunapipi (Denmark).



Pratiti Kaushal

A BATTLE YOU COULDN'T SURVIVE

You don't even realize,
you're losing yourself.
You don't even realize,
it's because of someone else.

You try to fit in where you never belong,
because everything you ever believed was wrong.

You forgot your importance
settling for an undeserving accordance

You forgot your capability,
just like you lost your dignity

You changed your company,
until you experienced an epiphany

You pretended to like the people you hated
just to escape from their hatred

You lost the people you loved
because you had it all misjudged.

You became what people wanted you to be,
to which once you used to firmly disagree

You lost faith in life,
just because you had a battle you couldn't survive...
You didn't want to strive,
just because you had a battle you couldn't survive...

- **Pratiti Kaushal** is a student of Class VIII at Reliance Foundation School, Surat.



BOOK REVIEW

The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 83¼ Years Old. Penguin, 2016.
pp. 376. ₹ 330.

Sushil Gupta

Just finished reading the *Diaries of Hendrik Groen*, a Dutch in his eighties. Through the years 2013 and 2014 Henrik wrote daily entries spanning into 360 and 411 pages respectively. He lives in an old-age home with two hundred other inmates, all Old Age Pensioners. Various character sketches are drawn with pronounced eccentricities and a litany of ailments. They are all lonely figures living away from their grown-up sons and daughters and their growing children. Once a week, on visitors' day, some members of the family turn up to cheer them up.

Universal undercurrents of despondency and loneliness are highlighted while at the same time issues that are of concern to the Dutch are touched upon. Meditations on Death, God, After-life, Euthanasia are touched upon in many entries. The best thing is that all this is narrated with a wry sense of humor. Let me share one of the entries to show why the book is a must read: "I was born in an age that had neither TV nor cars. There was one person in our street who had a telephone. We were allowed to use his phone to ring the doctor if necessary. I never went on holiday, and no one I knew had ever been in an aeroplane. Today, with the exception of one or two stubborn old coots in this home, there isn't anybody who doesn't have a TV, computer or telephone. You can speak to anyone at any time and any place, and you can travel to the other side of the world in a single day. My parents owned one Bible and one old encyclopaedia. Today, thanks to the computer, every household has access to more information than the greatest library in the world. People of my generation has seen so much of 'progress' that we can't keep up. Over the past ten or fifteen years I have started slowly but inexorably to lose my grasp on the world. I now gaze at it with mild bemusement from a fitting distance. The young people don't have much of a grasp on what's happening either, but they don't care. They think the world is just the way it is, and they barely notice that everything is constantly changing. I assume that in 2090 teenagers of today will look back on their lives with similar befuddlement."

- **Dr. Sushil Gupta** is author of *The Fourth Monkey* and former Professor of English, PG DAV College, University of Delhi.



Unwinding Self: A Collection of Poems by **Susheel Kumar Sharma**.
Vishvanatha Kaviraj Institute, 2020. pp. viii + 152. ₹ 250.

H. C. Gupta

Traversing *Unwinding Self*, I recall an Urdu couplet once read aloud by me at a meet of professors of English: “*Aaj ki kavita ko yeh alam to kya samjhe/ gar sau sal sir mare to mushkil se khuda samjhe*” (modern poetry is very difficult to be understood; even God will have to struggle for 100 years to understand it). This is as true of *Unwinding Self* as of any post-modernist poetical work. As regards the subject-matter of the poems in *Unwinding Self* I am reminded of Wordsworth’s words “Much it grieved my heart to think/ What man has made of man [and woman].” In this collection, some of the poems deal with the lore of the spiritual Indian-Hindu mythology. In some poems there are apparent blockades – all the readers do not know and understand all things; to take just one illustration: “The blue bird/ Was flying with Emirates/ Emirates sponsor cricket./ India take on England at Lords” (“Snapshots VI”). The lines are Latin and Greek for one not familiar with cricket and the politics of sponsorships and colonial-upmanship. Then there are hindrances involved in creating literature, which is “determined by the race, the moment and the milieu” (Hippolyte Taine).

The collection showcases lines in prose at several places like: “Invocation brings results quickly” (“Renewed Hope”), “Who shares the broken idols for future” (“Like Father, Unlike Son”) and “Who do I hurt/ If I leave this world?/ What loss I cause to the world/ If I go missing” (“Strutting Around”). Sharma also uses lines from the scriptures and poeticizes them, e.g. “Dust thou art, to dust returnest” (“A Mockdrill”); and “None eye pitied thee,/ to do any of these unto thee,/ to have compassion upon thee” (“Me, A Black Doxy”). Disillusionment makes the substratum of the collection. Susheel Sharma has his own brand of Haiku: the poem “Stories from the Mahabharata” illustrates this. The piece is narrative, a dramatic display of pictures.

On the whole the collection presents the muse clad in gaudy costumes, glittering diamonds. The contents enhance the readers’ knowledge of human values and human problems.

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The Village Poet & Other Stories by **Manoranjan Behura**. Authors-Press, 2020. pp. 116. ₹ 295.

Debashreemayee Das

This collection of stories by Manoranjan Behura, a columnist and short story writer who writes both in English and Odia, offers a glimpse into the fast-changing countryside of his imaginary native village, Basantapur. The countryside is changing fast, coming in contact with the urban culture. The urban culture has gradually replaced the village culture. Artificiality, rationality, cheating, secular ways of living and loving, and urban get-up have become a life mode in Basantapur, a microcosm of the Indian countryside. The imaginary village Basantapur is identified with the writer's own village, Mulabasanta, located in the Cuttack district of Odisha. All the stories are set in this imaginary village like the Malgudi of R. K. Narayana and Wessex of Thomas Hardy.

The collection is named after the first story, "The Village Poet." The people are ignorant about the poet's literary talent. He is mocked for his literary activities. Some young literate people flatter him and take benefits from him. When he discovers that his books are sold in different shops as the wrappers of selling goods, he dies of a heart attack. The fragrance of his poems lingers long after his death implying that a poet gets recognition for his work only after his death. The second story, "A Coward," is a story of love between a Hindu tuition teacher and a Muslim girl who is a tenth-class student. Both are in love with each other without any expression. Finally, when the girl informs her teacher that her marriage is fixed, the teacher remains silent. The girl tells him, "You are a coward." The teacher is left heartbroken after her marriage. Other stories – "Turning Point," "Vendor of Dry Fish," "Dream Flat in Bangalore," "Mysterious Findings," "Award or Punishment" – bring to light that the reality faced in the day-to-day life is tough to overcome. The stories are unique for their narrative style. The plots are simple and innovative but all characters are from rural background. The use of poetic and straightforward language makes the stories come alive.

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-Henrik Ibsen

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