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# RE-MARKINGS

Vol. 5 No. 1 March 2006

William Faulkner

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Diana Abu-Jaber

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Postcolonialism

Diaspora Studies

Reading Skills

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# **RE-MARKINGS**

**Vol. 5 No. 1 March 2006**

**ISSN 0972-611X**

Re-Markings, a biannual journal of English Letters aims at providing a healthy forum for scholarly and authoritative views on broad socio-political and cultural issues of human import as evidenced in literature, art, television, cinema and journalism with special emphasis on New Literatures in English including translations and creative excursions

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ISSN 0972-611X

Articles and research papers for publication in *Re-Markings* must conform to the *M.L.A. style sheet* and should not exceed 3000 words. Manuscripts should preferably be sent on floppy disk in text format along with a hard copy to the Chief Editor/Editor or through e-mail attachment to [remarkings@hotmail.com](mailto:remarkings@hotmail.com).

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Cover design : Sundeep Arora

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Printed at : Aydee Offset, Agra

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*Subscription Rates:*

Single Copy : Rs.100 US \$15 UK £10  
Annual (2 Issues) : Rs.200 US \$30 UK £20  
Three Years (6 Issues) : Rs.500 US \$75 UK £50  
(postage extra for registered Book-Post.)

Subscription may be sent by Money Order/ Demand Draft to

RE-MARKINGS  
68 New Idgah Colony,  
Agra-282001, U.P. (INDIA).

## EDITORIAL

If peradventure, reader, it has been thy lot to find yourself trapped in the labyrinths of contemporary academia where literary knights, armed with the lethal arsenal of literary theories, joust with each other and confound the bewildered onlooker, you needn't recede into the secluded confines of despair or depression. If you have felt intimidated by men and women talking of Bakhtin, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida et al. in conference and seminar rooms, or if you have tried in vain to comprehend critical jargons like poststructuralism, postcolonialism, diasporisation and postmodernism, all you need to do is learn the secret *mantra* that can inspire you to exchange a lance or two with some of these gallant knights. That *mantra* is "obscurity." A firm grounding in obscurity of thought and language can take you to higher altitudes of career advancement. Remember, posture can be as important as politics when it comes to the intelligentsia. In other words, it may be less important whether or not you like postmodernism than whether or not you can speak and write postmodernism.

First and foremost, you must realise the inefficacy of using plainly expressed language. It sounds too realist, modernist and obvious. Postmodern language requires the use of play, parody and indeterminacy as critical techniques to point this out. Often this is quite a difficult requirement, so obscurity is a well-acknowledged substitute. For example, let's imagine you want to say something like, "We should listen to the views of people outside of Indian society in order to learn about the cultural biases that affect us." This is honest but dull and somehow doesn't fit into the postmodern paradigm. Instead of the word "views," you would do well to use "voices", or better, "vocalities," or even better, "multi-vocalities." Add an adjective like "intertextual," and you're covered. "People outside" is also too plain. How about "postcolonial others"? To speak postmodern with expertise all you need is switch gears from plain clarity to complex obscurity so that you are able to "mediate" your "identities." Also, don't hesitate to use as many suffixes, prefixes, hyphens, slashes, underlinings and anything else you can think of. In order to make your presentation a grand success, just throw in a few names whose work everyone will agree is important and hardly anyone has had the time or the

inclination to read. Be careful, don't you tread on familiar and indigenous grounds. Adopt the "western" viewpoint, for the terminology used by European or American theorists are best when you are hunting for difficult material to navigate your way through postmodern/ postcolonial space.

It is rather ironical that the two World Wars resulted in killing not only millions of people indiscriminately but also in maiming and atrophying, by default, the innocent minds of the survivors into believing that everything – the story, the hero, even God – was dead. The perpetuation of this myth by intellectuals lost in the darkling groves of academe led to the negation of the pleasure principle that had hitherto informed the literature of all climes right from the days of Homer to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In spite of the proliferation of literary theories on a global scale that clouds the understanding of both life and art today, it is heartening to know that even highly acclaimed obscure writers are not unaware of the significance of a good story that appeals to the "laws of our primary nature" and is free from the imposition of all labels and signifiers like colonial, postmodern or postcolonial. As a case in point, I would like to recall a passage from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: "The secret of the Great Stories is that they have no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. They don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don't. In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again."

After such knowledge, what forgiveness!

**Nibir K. Ghosh**  
**Chief Editor**

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**AS DISTINCT AS BLACK AND WHITE:  
WOMEN IN FAULKNER'S LIGHT IN AUGUST,  
"DILSEY," "THAT EVENING SUN,"  
AND WALKER'S JUBILEE**

*Katy Howe*

The female characters in the fiction of William Faulkner and Margaret Walker are in dialogue with gender power and with the myth of white Southern womanhood. This myth, which permeates almost all of Faulkner's work, produces a considerable amount of conflict for the characters. The male characters have a distinct and insatiable need to save the virginity of the white woman. Judith Bryant Wittenberg writes that "Faulkner's work reveals the devastating effect on both men and women of the myth of spotless Southern womanhood" (235). White women are idealized by male characters while black women are dehumanized and branded as "other" because they can never live up to the expectations of the myth. *Light in August* emphasizes the dependence of white women on their male acquaintances while introducing strong, albeit nameless, black female characters. Faulkner's short stories "Dilsey" and "That Evening Sun" also show black female characters who have immense strength, allowing them to be completely independent of any male support and, at the same time, showcasing the futility of white women. Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* shows the myth of white Southern womanhood by highlighting Vvry's independence and juxtaposing it against Missy Salina's and Lillian's dependence.

White women, in the works discussed here, are completely dependent on men in every aspect of their lives. Judith Wittenberg argues that "Faulkner's women frequently exist only in the men" (243). I would like to invoke this statement in my discussion of the white women of Faulkner's *Light in August*, "Dilsey," "That Evening Sun," and Walker's *Jubilee*.

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**ONE DAY IN ASHADHA:  
UNACKNOWLEDGED EPIC OF A WOMAN**

***B.T. Seetha***

The title of Mohan Rakesh's play in Hindi, *Ashadha Ka Ek Din*, suggests an emphasis on one particular day in the month of Ashadha. Translated into English as *One Day in Ashadha* by Sarah K. Ensley, the phrase suggests any day in the month of Ashadha. Perhaps "*One Day of Ashadha*" would have been a better choice for the title.

*Ashadha*, following the month *Jeshta* in the Hindu calendar, is the last month of the summer season or the *Grishma rithu* and it announces the coming of the rains. Thus a particular day of the month suggests a pattern in the movement from the particular to the general, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic, from the day to the month to the season. *Ashadha* to *Aswayuja*, the *chaturmasa* period, is believed to be the time of Vishnu's rest when the goddesses take charge to fight sickness and disease, dirt and slush. *One Day in Ashadha* presents such a situation and calls our attention to the relationship between Man and Nature, Creation and Creativity. Analogously, if the artist is the creator/*Bramha*, the society is the creation run by *Vishnu*. The questions that the play raises are: What happens when Vishnu sleeps? What happens when the society responds to art not with feeling and emotion but with a superficial admiration only to satisfy one's own whims and fancies? Does art then become subdued by the forces of power and politics or can it be rescued by the sensitivity of the goddesses? How significant is time/season in this process of creativity? What is the role of prakriti or/and women?

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**IMPOSSIBLE IDEALS OF ASSIMILATION:  
JOY KOGAWA'S *OBASAN* AND  
DIANA ABU-JABER'S *ARABIAN JAZZ***

*Julie Bowman*

One of the difficulties of ethnic studies is the tendency to either over-emphasize ethnicity to the exclusion of other trends and categorizations or to de-emphasize ethnicity in a way that erases the possibility of multiple narratives and establishes a premature progressivism beyond ethnicity. In the first case, we might find an art movement, such as the Beat Generation, broken up into the ethnicities of its authors, its cohesiveness lost (Sollors 209). In the second case, we neglect the narratives that contribute to a more complete, less hegemonic master narrative. Considering assimilation, for example, one might categorize authors by their assimilated nationality and miss how they speak specifically to being other and the political trends that affect their assimilation and hybridization.

Joy Kogawa and Diana Abu-Jaber both deal with issues of assimilation in their novels *Obasan* and *Arabian Jazz*, respectively. *Obasan* explores the personal history of a Japanese Canadian woman (Naomi) and the difficulties (if not utter impossibility) of Japanese assimilation in Canada which resulted in the internment camps for individuals of Japanese national origin during World War II. *Arabian Jazz* focuses on the familial and personal conflicts of a Jordanian American woman (Jem) navigating her assimilation in America. Her experiences are considerably more light-hearted and less tragic than those in *Obasan*, however, considering the political climate in America post-9/11 and read in contrast to *Obasan*, the potential for her experience to be different becomes clear. Considering assimilation transnationally, I propose to look at the demands of assimilation, the difficulties of assimilation, and the role of the national climate in assimilation versus hybridization.

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## ANANTHA MURTHY'S *SAMSKARA*: HAPPINESS OF THE ABSURD

*R.K.Bhushan*

*Although "The Myth of Sisyphus" poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert. --  
Albert Camus*

U.R. Anantha Murthy says that "Samskara" is "A Rite for a Dead Man." Of course, by "rite", he means *samskara*. But the question is who is dead - Praneshacharya or Naranappa? It appears that the novel portrays life-in-death and death-in-life with subtle overtones. This short novel depicts nothing but death in the physical as well as metaphysical sense, and that, too, on an epic scale. On the surface, it is Naranappa who is dead and the chief concern of the novelist is to lead to a pragmatically acceptable solution through the philosophical and scriptural rigmarole to make an honourable provision for a rite for a dead man. And it is his artistic failure that even after the intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical odyssey of "the crest jewel of the Vedanta," the dominant issue remains unresolved. The protagonist and the antagonist remain a formidable challenge to each other. The antagonist, perhaps a symbol of the turbulent force of the changing value-system of the decadent and putrefying society whose daily conduct and life are determined and enforced by dark irrationality, refuses to stay within the fold and runs away with a triumph that mocks them all.

Everyone, including the spiritual leader, head and guide of the community – who, with all his nobility born out of his self-imposed suffering and misery, maintains and asserts the validity of his proclaimed and estimable image - is ready to excoriate and, if possible, pillory Naranappa and bring him within the framework of their own fancy.

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**ALIENATION AND ASSIMILATION IN JHUMPA  
LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE: A DIASPORIC STUDY**

*Dipika Sahai*

First of all I would like to pose a question: Why do we have so many writers of the Indian diaspora? The answer is simple. Many Indians have made money in Silicon valley but the incidence of psychological stress has been the highest among this section. The Indians abroad need India to help keep them sane. They want India to help them hold on to their children and grandchildren. They want to feel proud of India. Wherever they go, they want to feel good about being People of Indian Origin. Indians feel at home in the world. But they do want traces of the past – their heritage and lineage. The Indian “diaspora novel” in English is seen as one of the achievements of the non-resident Indian.

In the strict sense of the term “diaspora” connotes exile and suffering. Excepting early Naipaul, who had to leave even Trinidad, no other writer Salman Rushdie (pre-fatwa), Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry is in exile. They do not suffer as homeless do. Theirs is simply a residential choice, an elite relocation, no victimisation as such. The feeling of torment inherent in the word “diaspora” cannot be accredited to them. Still we have put them in one category as the writers of the diaspora.

Unfortunately, most of the non-resident novelists give a picture of murky crazy India which the west craves for. But Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a novel whose chief concern is the human condition. For her the joy of creating a new world is more important than exile. *The Namesake* is Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel about a second generation Indian-American trying to understand his heritage. Indians abroad, even though they have transplanted chunks of India in their new homes, strive for a balance not too little India, not too much either. Initially they feel alienated, but gradually the process of assimilation starts.

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## **SKILLED READERS AND THE PROCESS OF MEANING MAKING**

*K. Padmini Shankar*

Reading is an integral part of comprehension. Reading is done at various levels depending upon the purpose and need of the learners. All learners cannot glean the same amount and degree of meaning from a given text. And it is here that reading becomes a skill and skilled readers differ from ordinary readers in the way they interact with the learning material. The present paper attempts to identify the strategies and techniques that skilled readers employ.

The reading skill of an experienced reader could be described as a complex system of correlations between visual perception and speech motor process on the one hand and interpretation on the other. In fact, "reading is connected with almost all mental activities that there are! That is why it has been called visually guided thinking"(Crowder 121). A skilled reader could then be defined as someone who could comprehend the learning material at a good pace, assimilate it, recapitulate and reconstruct it at times of need. In order to attain maximum benefit from a given text, skilled readers employ the following methods:

i) Coordination of Processes: Reading is inherently sequential. Nevertheless, a skilled reader is often able to interrelate information from many words (sequential integration over the processing of many separate parts) as he/she progresses through the text. Also, reading involves several component processes such as perceptual, linguistic, conceptual etc. A skilled reader is capable of efficiently coordinating these processes in order to elicit meaning (vertical integration over several component processes).

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**THOMAS WOLFE:  
HIS PREOCCUPATION WITH DEATH**

*Sadhana Chaturvedi*

With the armistice of 1918 and the peacemaking of 1919 America entered a period of revolt. The war was bad, disillusioning and disastrous in its consequences. It seemed that world was breaking into pieces. The people of that decade became numb and stopped thinking and believing. It was the time when hearts of the people were obsessed with one feeling -- the presence of the war. The war had got into everything: it was in things that moved and things that were still. The times were those of bloodsheds and murders. People had no hope for the future. They saw their kith and kins dying and became mute with horror. The war brought about not only physical disaster but also psychic and spiritual. Because of these after-effects of the war, death became the most fascinating feature of that time. None was left untouched by the cold and cruel hands of the ultimate reality. Everyone saw death playing its game the world over.

Thomas Clayton Wolfe, the most autobiographical novelist of the modern times, was very much fascinated by death. Like other novelists of the times, he chose death as one of his major themes. His preoccupation with death is like that of Hemingway and Willa Cather. Thomas Wolfe wrote the life he lived and watched. All his novels -- *Look Homeward, Angel* (1920), *Of Time and the River* (1935), *The Web and the Rock* (1939) and *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940) -- are chronological accounts of his own life. Thomas Wolfe's preoccupation with death, apparent in all his books, is especially prominent in his earlier works. In his first novel *Look Homeward, Angel* four aspects of death pervade Eugene's (the protagonist's) consciousness: his father carves tombstones for a living, i.e. his trade is dealing with death.

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**THE RED LIGHT AT THE CITY SIGNAL:  
DISCOURSE ON POETRY,  
PROLOGUE, DIALOGUE, EPILOGUE**

*Arunachalam Angappan*

There could be a possibility for unanimity or at least near-nativity of opinions, views, ideas, theories, formulations in every sphere of activity of humanity except perhaps in the area of human proclivity for imaginative creativity. It is all the more so in the field of the eldest sister of the brood, viz. poetry, which together with the other siblings like painting, architecture, music and so on, constitutes what is called the culturality of a community.

Art is as dynamic as culture, the former being an integral and influential component of the latter. The culturality of a community of people, a nation or for that matter that of the humanity as a whole transgressing all barriers of race, religion and region, is ever in a state of turmoil that remains imperceptible to day to day consciousness of the members who themselves cause it fired by their aspirations. Every dynamic aspect of human endeavour is directed towards a striving for mobility, that is, mobility from a comparative complacency to a comparative excitement, a sort of culmination in *crème de la crème*. These strivings emanating from any and every known and unknown corners of the world merge and synthesize on certain underlying benchmarks in the imperceptible flux of time and emerge at one unexpected moment as a holistic phenomenon. What deceives human perception as static is in fact always dynamic. But it is impossible to say at which point the static becomes dynamic. Consider, for example, the negative aspect of evolution in the cycle of human civilization: i.e., from the stark nakedness and animalness (physical rather than spiritual or intellectual) of the Neanderthal man to the ...

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## JOYCE CAROL OATES'S "RUTH": A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY

*Shalini Bhargava*

Joyce Carol Oates is one of those contemporary American writers whose fiction reflects the turmoil of the era. She brings forth the reality of the American. Although she does not accept herself as a feminist writer, her fiction mainly focuses on women in distress. Her women characters crave for identity in a hostile world and try to seek fulfillment by involvement in different relationships. The quest for survival by young girls in a male dominated society and their gradual development towards autonomy is the theme of many of her short stories. The young girls belonging to the age of transition were not left untouched by the rise of feminism and the spirit of breaking through the age old barriers created by the society. *The Goddess and Other Women* is one of Oates's collection which primarily presents women who are struggle for existence and also face challenges that come forth from time to time, and who at times take up the role of a destroyer while seeking independence. This paper tends to focus on the psyche of an American adolescent girl of the 1960s and 70s. The short story under consideration is "Ruth" from Joyce Carol Oates's collection *The Goddess and Other Women*. The young protagonist will be analyzed in the light of the feminist psychoanalytic theory.

Ruth of the short story "Ruth" from this collection is a young girl who tries to come to terms with the circumstances and the adversities that life poses before her. Her plight reveals that Oates's young women desire to live a satisfying life and create more meaningful roles for themselves. They try to attain completeness by establishing sexual liaisons. They try to come to terms with their developing sexuality and the power it equips them with, but it always has a negative effect on their relationships and results in destruction.

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**AHIMSA AS THE SOUL FORCE IN  
NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S *LESSER BREEDS***

*Shivputra Shivraj Kanade*

*Generations to come, it may be, will scarce  
believe that such a one as this ever in flesh  
and blood walked upon this earth.*

- Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein's respectful tribute to Mahatma Gandhi bears testimony to the fact that while many isms have appeared and disappeared, *ahimsa* still lives in the oceanic heart of every Indian and is deeply incorporated in Indian psyche and soul as manifestation of a soul force that offers love, brotherhood and peace.

In her latest novel, *Lesser Breeds*, Nayantara Sahgal, a distinguished novelist and political commentator, endorses the rich history of pre-and-post Independence India vis-à-vis *ahimsa*. She subscribes firmly to the belief that *ahimsa*, the soul force, would ultimately overcome the sword force. The narrative of the novel leaves the door open to a faithful picture of the Gandhian world.

The storyline is a systematic search for the Gandhian theory of *ahimsa*, which is precipitated by the visit of an American scholar who embarks on a treasure-hunt in India to find a direct answer to the sensitive question: whether *ahimsa* is relevant in contemporary India? This novel is a direct response to this question.

Actually *ahimsa*, a living illustration of healthy life, designates human and social action endowed with the unique spirit of an individual or a group of people. It is, in fact, a way of life. It is endowed with an enormous capacity to transform a terrible opponent into a faithful friend through the peaceful weapon of love.

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## **HOLES IN THE MULTICULTURAL CANVAS HITTING THE WALL IN DIASPORA STUDIES**

*Rajesh Kumar Sharma*

Cut loose from Jewish Studies, the discourse of diaspora appears to have undergone an opening up and become a global space of difference and cultural democracy in the prevailing ideological climate. Mapping the uncharted diasporic territories is nowadays considered not only politically correct but academically voguish as well. In this stormy age when theories shift as if by default like the wallpaper on one's desktop, many souls find intellectual asylum, if not anchorage, in diaspora studies. And why should they not? Diaspora studies offer, in addition to intellectual and other kinds of fellowship, a sense of gratification that derives from the vanity of serving national and ethnic interests. That this service may be commandeered by a certain global cultural-political economy is a matter that can be discreetly overlooked though.

Hence the rediscovery—after its passage through dehistoricization and semantic aggrandizement—of the term *diaspora* and its reception which compares favourably with the kind usually reserved for the news of isolation of some elusive virus: the rediscovery brings a sense of euphoria and empowerment, as if *to name* were to bring under control. The fog appears to lift at once, and the dark territory seems to bare itself to light. But I am afraid there has been a good deal of concealing in this revealing. That the liberating articulation has also meant a certain amount of disciplining and exclusion of the repressive kind.

I shall give my fears the rude shape of an unsophisticated question: Which kinds of diaspora find a home in the diasporic literary and cultural studies in our departments in the prevailing environment? The question is, by default, tagged to the burden of English, the language that is the chief gatekeeper to the discipline of diaspora studies in India today.

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## INTERROGATING/DEFENDING POSTCOLONIALISM

*Manmohan Singh*

Although postcolonial theory is already well-established as a discipline, yet the precise meaning of the term 'postcolonial' and the precise parameters of the field are still in debate. It is a field riven by contradictions and inconsistencies and this is more true of postcolonial theory than of postcolonial studies in general. Like postmodernism, it has been rejected by some (Meenakshi Mukherjee, for instance) as another faddish import from the West or a theory which privileges migrant sensibility at the expense of local conditions or concerns.<sup>1</sup> According to Aijaz Ahmed, for Indian/Asian academics placed in the hegemonic academy in the West, East "seems to have become, yet again a career...within the Occident too."<sup>2</sup> He criticizes postcolonial theory for its failure to address the questions of class, capitalist modernity and the progressive potential of the discourses of Marxism and nationalism. Arif Dirlik sees it as a discourse servicing the requirements of globalizing capitalism of which the Third World intellectuals are "not so much the victims as the beneficiaries."<sup>3</sup> Robert Young is of the view that "colonial discourse has reached a stage where it is itself in danger of becoming oddly stagnated, and as reified in its approach - and therefore in what it could produce at the level of analysis - as colonial discourse which it analyses."<sup>4</sup> Some of these criticisms of postcolonial theory are fairly justified, though the fear that this is another attempt at colonization of the Third World (this time via theory) is certainly unfounded.

This paper proposes to interrogate the two basic premises of postcolonial theory: First, its own Eurocentrism (its own reliance on the very discourses which it seeks to subvert); Second, its questioning of Eurocentrism. The paper will also attempt to examine the nature of the postcolonial oeuvre, its background and context--the poststructuralist/ postmodernist theoretical terrain as well as modern/postmodern socio-cultural configurations--from which it emerges.

- **Dr. Manmohan Singh** teaches English at the Punjabi University Regional Centre, Bathinda.

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## **HINDI ON THE WORLD'S STAGE: CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL SHAPIRO**

*Sunita Rani*

A Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Chicago (1974), Michael C. Shapiro is Professor of Hindi in the South Asian Studies Faculty at the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, USA. His publications include *Language and Society in South Asia* (with Harold F. Schiffman) (1981), *A Primer of Modern Standard Hindi* (1989), *Studies in the Historical Phonology of Asian Languages* (with William G. Boltz) (1991), "Hindi," in *The Indo-Aryan Languages* edited by George Cardona and Dhanesh Jain (2003). His *A Primer of Modern Standard Hindi* presents a systematic introduction to the structure of Modern Standard Hindi generally used in a classroom setting. It is intended to provide the student with a thorough foundation in the grammatical structure of that variety of Hindi that is commonly taught in Indian schools and that is the common vehicle of publication in Hindi. His Current research projects include a book length study on the structure and history of the Hindi language, studies on the linguistic structure and rhetorical structures of early New Indo-Aryan texts, and work on aspects of early Sikh scripture. Shapiro has visited India twice on Fulbright assignments and is well acquainted not only with various dimensions of Indian society and culture but also with the delicacies of the Indian cuisine. In this conversation with Sunita Rani at Seattle, Shapiro shares his interest in India, its people and the potentialities of Hindi language.

**Sunita:** How did you get interested in the Hindi language?

**Shapiro:** I started studying Hindi in 1967, at the University of Pennsylvania and then continued at the University of Chicago. I took a total of three years of formal Hindi in school, and then continued learning the language in India, mostly in Delhi.

- **Dr. Sunita Rani** is Reader in the Department of Hindi Studies and Research at Agra College, Agra.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH WINSOME PINNOCK

*Ranu Uniyal*

Winsome Pinnock is one of the leading feminist playwrights in Britain. A winner of several prestigious awards like the George Devine Award, Thames TV Playwright's Scheme Award for Best Play of the Year 1991 and Unity Trust Theatre Award, Winsome Pinnock writes primarily about the immigrants in England and is one of the first Black women playwrights to have focused on women of Caribbean origin. Her plays handle multiple issues and ask questions that have not been given their due so far. In *Talking in Tongues* she brings out the Black women's anger and jealousy. *Mules* is about the plight of Black Jamaican women in British prisons. *Picture Palace* was first performed in 1988. A short play *Water* in 2001 received much applause. *One Under* was first produced in 2005. It is about a tube train driver Cyrus and his experiences on the underground. Pinnock has worked for Young People's Theatre in London, and is actively involved with Royal Court Theatre and Television. In this interview conducted by Ranu Uniyal in Lucknow, Pinnock talks about her concerns as a playwright in terms of both colour and gender.

**Uniyal:** Could you please tell me something about your background?

**Pinnock:** I was born into a working class immigrant family in London. My parents migrated from West Indies and settled in London. There was nobody in my family who was particularly theatrical or literary. But I read a lot from a very young age. I was fortunate enough to attend school with a lot of theatre work and then with a group of friends who loved theatre I became a part of theatre in London where there is a rich tradition of Young People's theatre.

**Uniyal:** How old were you when you first wrote a play for Young Theatre's group and what was the response to it?

- **Dr. Ranu Uniyal** is Reader in the Department of English at Lucknow University, Lucknow.

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## PRESENT IN OUR SPACE: A MEDITATION ON THE MEANING OF SLAVE TAGS

*Kathleen Alcalá*

An article in *The Seattle Times* of February 25, 2003, piqued my curiosity about a branch of collecting. During the time of legal slavery in the United States, slave holders in South Carolina were allowed to rent their slaves to other individuals, or even municipalities. A slave owner would pay the city a fee, much as one pays a car license fee.

In order that they might be readily identified, these people were issued metal "slave tags," a sort of badge that bore a number and the task which the wearer was designated to perform, such as "house servant" or "mechanic." Slave owners were fined if the slave failed to wear the tag. It enabled him or her to walk alone through the city, or be put to work outside of the context of a plantation. This method of identification was in use for only a short time, so not too many tags were issued.

Now, they are sought as collector's items, bringing as much as \$26,000 at auction. "People like the rarity," says Harlan Greene, co-author of a forthcoming book on the slave badges. "But I also think it is the drama, the gothic horror in that it was worn by a slave."

My first question upon reading this article was, who would collect these? I went on ebay (for the first time!) and sure enough, there were three lots which included these tags for sale, all by the same seller. I was also reminded that people collect African Americana - Aunt Jemima syrup containers, and Little Golden Books about Little Black Sambo. I recalled reading an article about this, a younger generation of African Americans intrigued by the objectification of their coloring and culture. *The Art and History of Black Memorabilia*, by Larry Vincent Buster, covers this field of collecting, and there is even a *Black Ethnic Collectibles* magazine.

- **Kathleen Alcalá** is a visiting Lecturer at the University of New Mexico, she lives in Bainbridge Island, USA.

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## REMEMBERING AUGUST WILSON

*Nibir K. Ghosh*

August Wilson, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and a giant of the contemporary American theatre, died on Gandhi Jayanti (October 2, 2005) at the Swedish hospital in Seattle. I knew he had been ailing from liver cancer but I, like many of Wilson's friends and admirers thought the fateful day was still far away. When I received an email from the celebrated Charles Johnson informing me of Wilson's death, I was a little shocked and benumbed and all I could write back to Charles was: "Death has been unusually harsh in showing such undue haste."

The news brought in with a rush the fond memories of our eventful meeting at the Broadway Grill in Capitol Hill, Seattle on November 11, 2003. Based at the University of Washington, Seattle for my senior Fulbright research project during 2003-04, I just couldn't resist the temptation of desiring a meeting with the legendary hero of the contemporary African American Theatre. I had heard from several quarters that meeting August Wilson was a tough job as he was an extremely busy playwright and was not easily accessible. Imagine the thrill I may have experienced when I got a call from Charles Johnson saying that none but August Wilson had invited us, i.e. me and my wife Sunita, to be his guest at dinner at the Broadway Grill and that Charles would be happy to take us there. It sounded like a dream come true. August Wilson met us with a great deal of warmth and in a little while we felt quite comfortable in his formidable presence.

Wilson began to talk and the conversation centered around his life, his work, and his characteristic controversial stand related to black theatre. Born on April 27, 1945, in Pittsburgh to a white father (Frederick August Kittle) who never lived with his family and a black mother (Daisy Wilson) from North Carolina, August shared life with his mother and five siblings.

- **Dr. Nibir K. Ghosh** teaches English at Agra College, Agra.

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Men reject  
their prophets  
and slay them,  
but they love  
their martyrs  
and  
honour those  
whom they have slain.

*Fedor Dostoevsky*  
The Brothers Karamazov

ISSN 0972-611X