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Norman Mailer

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Kiran Desai

Judith Wright

Arun Kolatkar

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James Baldwin

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Louise Erdrich

Mahesh Dattani

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Mirza Mohd. Ruswa

Indian Diaspora

Indian Women Poets

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Chief Editor

Nibir K. Ghosh,
68 New Idgah Colony,
Agra-282001, U.P. (INDIA).
Telephone : +91 562 2420330
Cell.: +91 98970 62958
e-mail : ghoshnk@hotmail.com

Editor

A. Karunaker,
House No. 12-13-257,
Street No. 3, Brindavan Residency
Taranaka
Secunderabad-500017.
Tel: +91 40 27001349
e-mail : karunakeredrem@hotmail.com

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EDITORIAL

Notwithstanding the politics and controversy that accompany the award of literary prizes - be it the Nobel, the Booker, the Pulitzer and the like – it must be accepted that the Best of the Booker Award for Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* certainly calls for jubilation, especially from the perspective of Indian Writing in English. *Midnight's Children* not only bagged the Booker Prize in 1981 and the Booker of Bookers in 1993, but also inspired many Indians to start writing fiction in English in a brave new way besides preparing the ground for Indian Writing in English to take center stage in the global literary pantheon.

Rushdie's masterpiece ushered in a new voice that was at once exuberantly magical, cosmopolitan and multicultural, and yet so deeply rooted in Indian traditions of storytelling. Since then Indian writing has been growing steadily and at a rapid pace, diversifying, experimenting, expanding to confirm, perhaps, what Ruskin Bond had once stated: "It was thought that with the departure of the British, the English language was finished in India. In fact, just the opposite has happened. English has flowered in India to an extent it had never done in British times."

The deluge of Indian Writing in English in the present time confirms that we have traveled a long way from Naipaul's despairing statement: "the creative urge has failed...Shiva has ceased to dance" and that we have learnt the expertise to surmount the difficulties of conveying in "a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own," as pointed out by Raja Rao in his foreword to *Kanthapura*(1938). A decade ago when an interviewer asked Arundhati Roy - the 1997 Booker prize winner for *The God of Small Things* - "What does it mean to be an Indian novelist today? What does it mean to be Indian?" She immediately shot back saying, "What is Indian? What is India? Who is Indian?" Do we ask, "What does it mean to be American? What does it mean to be British?" I think perhaps that the question we should ask is, "What does it mean to be human?" Likewise, responding to similar prejudice, Kiran Desai, the winner of the Booker for *The Inheritance of Loss*, is no less equivocal in stating: "This book was a return journey to the fact of being Indian, to realising the perspective was too important to give up. America might give me half a narrative, but I had to return to India for the other half of the story, for emotional depth, historical depth. I don't care about passports. Literature is located beyond flags and anthems, simple ideas of loyalty."

These remarks testify that in this age of globalization, where cyberspace has literally shrunk the world in terms of both space and time, it is imperative for the writer as well as the reader to recognize that interface of cultures demands the creation of a beautiful mosaic of multiculturalism that cuts across narrow walls of divisiveness to discover and embrace the quintessence of the truly human. Derek Walcott is probably right when he says how a writer through “creative schizophrenia” can turn the fragmented cultural legacy occasioned by colonialism into a source of strength rather than divisiveness.

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 Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. 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 way that although you know that one day you will die, you live as though you won’t. In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn’t. And yet you want to know again.

I am optimistic that in the years to come we can look forward to enjoying many great stories that showcase a mingling of traditional elements with western cultural mores to create the limitless possibilities of a vastly diversified unity wherein literature may address the dual function of “prayojana” and “purushartha” – immediate usefulness and ultimate goal.

Nibir K. Ghosh
Chief Editor

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THE STRANGER AT THE DOOR: MOBILITY, ARRIVAL, HOSPITALITY

Rüdiger Kunow

I.

The stranger at the door is one of the emblematic figures of our time. Whether as impending threat or as long-awaited newcomer, the stranger is keeping us engaged—emotionally, morally, intellectually, academically. He and increasingly she, embodies the mobility of our time, renders concrete the complex network of contact, exchange, interrelation in which more and more people are implicated. At the same time, the stranger at the door also poses questions of appropriate conduct, of duties and obligations, both on the side of the stranger and that of his/her hosts. Such questions of rights, respect, recognition are ethical in their nature and they remind us that mobility and ethics are interrelated in multiple and complex ways. In this paper I will attempt to trace some of these relations by focusing on a concrete moment or situation, that which gives the title to this paper: a stranger at the door.

The stranger has been seen standing at many doors, including those of the academy. Literary and cultural studies have over the last decades come to acknowledge his/her presence, have become more and more mobility sensitive. Such a sensitivity expresses itself in many forms, perhaps most notably in the search for new research frames allowing us to come to terms with the many new forms of literary expression and cultural praxis that no longer limit themselves to a single cultural perspective, praxis or heritage, but grapple instead with "the precarious motion[s]" (Amit-Talai 329) of people, objects, and ideas inside and outside the spaces of the nation state. This disciplinary interest has over the last years privileged a particular research imagination, one that has dwelled in and on motion, has highlighted exchange, the internal and "external networking" (Welsch 197) of cultures, their "worlding" (Dirlik 288; of the United States).

- **Dr. Ruediger Kunow** is Professor and Chair, American Studies Program, Potsdam University & President, German Association for American Studies, Potsdam, Germany.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

POETRY BY WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

Seemin Hasan

A comparative, relational and historical genealogy of feminism emerges through Indian women's poetry in English in post-independence India. Women's poetry in English, in post-independence India, serves as a forum for women, provides role models, promotes sisterhood, and is congenial for the achievement of cultural androgyny and heightened awareness. The Indian feminine poetic sensibility as expressed in English presents a synthesis of modern urban education with essential and universal experiences of womankind. Women's poetry has a two-pronged purpose. It reveals the growth of the feminine poetic consciousness as well as defines the changing position of women in Indian society.

Women's literature in English is a marginalized area of critical study. The path of women's development has neither been linear nor easy. The journey has been marked by an educational process in which the anti-colonial struggle against the British and the founding of an independent state infused the fabric of every day life. The larger feminist consciousness has been shaped by the burden of colonialism and the euphoric promise of nationalism and self-determination which were largely premised within the normative parameters of masculinity.

The colonization enterprise created the westernized native bourgeoisie to whom was assigned the task of defining national identity and national literature. Much intensive and extensive work was done on literature in English by men and a vast field emerged.

Women's writing was relegated to women's magazines and dismissed as whims of the over-protected, upper class, English-speaking women, uttered as a diversion. The pre-independence women writers were charged with constructing an imaginary community. The disciplinary gatekeepers kept at bay those dimensions of cultural history, cultural economy and canon building that affected women. Women's poetry remained neglected except for some occasional eulogizing about selected poets like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.

- **Dr. Seemin Hasan** is a Reader in the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**REDEFINING TRANSCENDENTALISM IN THE LIGHT
OF AMBEDKARVAD: A STUDY OF
KIRVANT AND ROUTES AND ESCAPE-ROUTES**

Dharamdas M. Shende

*Every human problem must be considered from the
standpoint of time. --Frantz Fanon*

Indian philosophy has explained the teaching/meaning of transcendentalism that brings about the union between the soul and supreme soul through the *Upanishada* and *Bhagavat Gita* to free human beings from the binary oppositions of *Paap* and *Punya* in ancient civilization. But the binary oppositions of modern civilization are different. Modern civilization is full of new binary oppositions such as Brahmin/Shudra, Savarna/Avarna, Superior/Inferior, High-Born caste/Low-born caste, Mainstream/ Marginalized, Sprishya/Asprishya, Centre/Periphery. In order to free mankind from such new binary oppositions and to see it properly united, today, we do need to preach and practice the Buddha's all comprehensive humanitarian approach to life - it alone can help us to transcend the walls of casteism. This humanitarian outlook could bring about the true union between the center and the periphery. This was the focus of the teaching of Ambedkar. This paper, therefore, makes an attempt to understand the problem of casteism as articulated by Premanand Gazvi in *Kirvant* and Datta Bhagat in *Routes and Escape-Routes* in the light of Ambedkarvad with a view to locating a common denominator in human relationship between the mainstream and the marginalized.

It is my belief that the societies that practice the spirit of humanism would transcend the barriers of casteism and achieve the moksha in real sense. A society without humanism is bound to continue the strain of oppression. It is just another man-made diplomacy of the majority that contrives to oppress the minority so that they would not turn up to your call to touch the bowl of curd-rice - you offer to the crow in order to celebrate the memory of your dead near and dear ones - that we recognize as *pinddan*. This is exactly what the playwright Premanand Gazvi writes in his dedication to the play, *Kirvant*.

- **Dr. Dharamdas M. Shende** is Head, Department of English, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

IDENTITY OF THE SELF AND THE NATION IN MAILER'S *THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT*

Arun Soule

Among the many features of modernism, the question of identity is of great significance. In this paper the identity of the Self, and simultaneously that of the Nation will be examined. It also suggests that in some intrinsic way the identity of the individual and that of the Nation is inexorably linked together. Norman Mailer's famous Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Armies of the Night* (1968), will be taken up to discuss this issue.

Initially America was identified in religious terms as "God's promised land," when the first Pilgrim Fathers landed in Plymouth in 1620. There is a direct parallel of God leading the oppressed Hebrews under the Egyptian Pharaoh to the "promised land of milk and honey" in the *Old Testament* of the *Bible*. Later the identity of America, as a nation, was perceived in idealistic terms also as: a) The land of freedom from oppression, freedom of choice to pursue happiness and satisfaction; b) A harmonious melting pot of different communities.

However, the common man experienced a change in the identity of the nation, especially after the Second World War, when he realized and perceived the fact that the American Establishment has amassed enormous power, and reduced the individual to a simple and dispensable cog in the huge machinery of the State. This was the direction in which America was slowly and surely moving, and had established itself as such around the time of the Vietnam War. With the collapse of Russia as a superpower, America manifested itself in an emerging unipolar world, and took for itself the identity of the "Super Cop" of the whole world. The military action initiated in Afghanistan and Iraq are its more recent examples.

Even during the period of the Vietnam War, the people had come to recognize America's latent totalitarian tendencies and its technological oppression, and sympathized with the Vietnamese defending their small country against the awesome might of America.

- *Dr. Arun Soule is Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.*

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

INDIAN LANDSCAPE IN THE POETRY OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Satendra Kumar

Endowed with prodigious talents, Jayanta Mahapatra is undoubtedly a distinguished poet on the contemporary commonwealth literary scene. He ranks with such eminent Indian English poets as Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarthy and others. Like Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan, he is widely read and discussed both at home and abroad. But unlike Ezekiel and Ramanujan, Mahapatra's desire to adapt an indigenous tradition to English language and thereby create a new Indian English immediately sets him a class apart from most of his contemporaries. Mahapatra has influenced a number of contemporary Indian English poets and brought recognition by being the first Indian poet in English to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of verse, *Relationship* in 1981.

Jayanta Mahapatra is a creative genius. Though he began writing poetry rather late, he has not looked back since he published his first book of verse, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* in 1971. Like many Indian English poets, he does not show the clear influence of world poets, as he has not read much poetry in his life. Without being shy, he admits it in an interview with N. Raghavan:

You see, I haven't read much poetry in my life. As a matter of fact, I hadn't read any poetry until I started writing myself. No, not even poets like Eliot or Whitman or Tagore. I was trained to be a physicist. But I have veered away from physics in a way.¹

Jayanta Mahapatra has an open mind and perhaps a willing ear in choosing the themes for his poetry in his effort to acclimatize English language. Mahapatra has chosen for his themes various subjects beginning with landscape of his country to International problems. A poet's response to the landscape of his country, his sense of tradition and culture of the land of his birth and many other factors go together to make him assume an identity of his own. In this context it can be inferred that Mahapatra intuitively learnt to observe, understand and absorb his landscape before confidently turning to its human figures.

- **Dr. Satendra Kumar** is Head, Department of English, Government P.G. College Lansdowne, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

NATIONALISM IN QUESTION: A READING OF KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Girija Nambiar

It is generally agreed that nationness and nationalism are European inventions which came into existence towards the end of the eighteenth century. There is also a general consensus among liberal historians that the formative lessons of nationalism were acquired in the colonial classroom through the teaching of European national histories. It is also maintained that in its positive aspect nationalism ought to impart to the citizen an understanding of the value of international concerns. Other thinkers, however, have postulated the European nation as universal, capable of accommodating the rest of the world. Colonialism then becomes the logical result of the universal ethnocentricism which was the moving spirit of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century European nationalism.

Anti-colonial nationalism that finally led to the birth of postcolonial nation-states has often been accused of being mimetic. Indian nationalism has also been found guilty by some thinkers of being a mere derivation of European post-Enlightenment discourse. The awakening of national consciousness is believed to bring rationality and development to the nation-State. Yet anti-colonial nationalism in some cases invokes energies which are against the State, for anti-colonial nationalism is born and acquires meaning in terms of struggle. The spirit of this struggle is rooted in a shared tradition and culture that is indigenous. Thus anti-colonial nationalism not only contradicts the pre-eminence of the State but also gives scope for dissent.

The contradiction that lies at the heart of nationalist discourse is in the universal claims of Western nationalism and the specific anti-Western and oppositional development of cultural nationalism in the 'third world'. Thus while some thinkers argue that nationness is the most universally legitimate value in modern political life, at the same time paradoxically, competing or 'separatist' appeals for nationhood are generally condemned as signs of political illegitimacy. Several thinkers appear to have had reservations about the postcolonial state.

- **Dr. Girija Nambiar** is Reader in the Department of English at Maris Stella Autonomous College, Vijayawada.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

IDENTITY CRISIS IN INDIAN DIASPORA

Deepkumar Jayprakash Trivedi

When the continental plates separated out, the local migration within a geographically defined single landmass was transformed into cross-continental migration. Aided by the tectonics of the earth, the earliest human beings became great migrants but they were not 'civilized' and hence when the first civilizations cropped up they became the first 'civilized' natives. Still, the civilizations of Indus Valley (India), Yangtze-Kiang Valley (China), Tigris-Euphrates basin (Mesopotamia) and Nile basin (Egypt) cannot be said to have been inhabited by the original natives as they were periodically over-run by newer migrant groups. The newer migrant groups either scattered the former groups or amalgamated with them to become the new natives.

The process went on for ages and, allied with the increase in population, it ultimately gave rise to the concept of a 'melting pot'. India became the first melting pot of the world and since the coming of the Aryans, India has received invaders, traders and refugees in various migratory patterns. There are the Greeks and the Macedonians who came with Alexander; then came the case of displacement of the whole Parsi Community from Persia to India; then came the Arab traders followed by Persians, Afghans and Turkish Traders as well as invaders, and finally came the Mughals. All these migratory people have undergone such assimilation in the melting pot of India that they have become its natives. Even the Colonial powers did not escape effects of the melting pot. The Anglo-Indian Community in India is more Indian than anything else. Of late the Second World War saw the migration of some Jews to India; the 1970s saw the coming of 'hippies' and all along there has been constant migration of traders and refugees from India's neighboring countries like China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Burma. These latter groups are still in the process of assimilation.

The 'melting pot' is not an isolated concept related to India only. The United Kingdom is also an example of the same. Since the early Phoenicians to the Angles, the Jutes, the Saxons, the Normans and the Romans, all have become the natives of Britain.

- **Dr. Deepkumar Jayprakash Trivedi** is Lecturer in English at N.S. Patel Arts College, Anand (Gujarat).

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

SENSE OF PLACE IN THE POEMS OF JUDITH WRIGHT AND ARUN KOLATKAR

Mridula Rashmi Kindo

Both Australia and India have a very lively body of recent English language poetry. Judith Wright from Australia and Arun Kolatkar from India are in the forefront of recent commonwealth poetry. This paper would take up three poems in all (one by Kolatkar and two by Judith Wright) to establish how contingent particulars work in their poems but first a little about the lives of the two poets.

Judith Wright (1915-2000) was born in Armidale, New South Wales. She entered Sydney University in 1934. Wright studied philosophy, history, psychology and English without taking a degree. Wright started to publish poems in the late 1930s in literary journals. She is one of the powerful voices of poetry in recent times. She has moved from the personal to the social and from the world of nature to the world of politics while writing poetry. She was also an uncompromising environmentalist and social activist campaigning for Aboriginal land rights. One remarkable quality of her poetry is a sense of place which comes especially in her poems "A Train Journey" and "At Cooloolah."

A similar quality is found in the poem *Jejuri* written by Kolatkar. Born in Kolhapur in Maharashtra (India), Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) was an artist. He went to J.J. School of Art in Bombay in 1949 and other art schools in Kolhapur and Pune in 1957. He took his Diploma in painting from the J.J. School of Art. He published his first book of poetry *Jejuri* in 1976 and turned to full time poetry writing. He became an important contemporary Indian poet whose contribution to modern Indian poetry in English is significant. His poem *Jejuri* won him the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977. *Jejuri* is considered among the finest single poems written in India in the past forty years and in no time went into three editions. *Jejuri* is a site of pilgrimage in Kolatkar's native state Maharashtra and the poem *Jejuri* records a visit to this place. The poem *Jejuri* consists of thirty six sections, each a poem in itself.

- **Mridula Rashmi Kindo** teaches English at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

JAMES BALDWIN: A SECULAR HUMANIST

Gur Pyari Jandial

At Bowling Green University, in 1978, a classroom discussion was being held between some students of mixed race. After sometime, a Black student exploded in anger, "I am not going to hold hands and climb a mountain with my oppressor." At this, his supervisor, also a black, calmly told him, "If you refuse to hold hands and help your oppressor to climb the mountain then you will be left forever, standing at the foot of the mountain where he wants you to be. Has it ever occurred to you that his need to climb that mountain may be as great as yours?" (Champion 1981:63)

These words were spoken by James Baldwin, a writer whose impact has profoundly altered America's social and literary consciousness. One of the most basic assumptions found in Baldwin's art is that though differences exist, there is a sphere of commonality where dissimilarities cease to be important and are unable to stifle human communication. It is this connecting power that Baldwin holds out to us as the only hope for humanity and this hope lies in the fraternity of human beings. For Baldwin, this love, in which he so strongly believes, is a powerful force which can affect a transformation in human lives. James Mossman quoting Baldwin (1965:57) describes it as "something more like fire, like the wind, something which can change you. I mean a passionate belief, a passionate knowledge of what a human being can do to change the world in which he finds himself."

Love, in this sense, is not a spiritual entity or a concept separated from physical embodiment; rather it includes all aspects of man's relationship with man. The range of Baldwin's novels covers a variety of human relationships. Whites are shown in intimate relationships with Blacks, heterosexuals with homosexuals and homosexuals with women, but there is no suggestion of neurotic perversity. The relationships are underlined by serious and intense emotions.

- **Dr. Gur Pyari Jandial** teaches English at Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

***SUBALTERN SPEAK: FEMINIST IDENTITY IN
THE NAUTCH GIRL AND UMRAO JAN ADA***

Haris Qadeer

The present paper will attempt to analyze the works such as Hasan Shah's *The Nautch Girl* and Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* in the light of feminist literary and critical theory. These works were originally written in Persian and Urdu respectively and later translated into English. My paper will consider their English translations. The background of both these works is colonial Lucknow and the Awadh and they deal with the lives of courtesans or *tawaifs*.

Feminism and feminist critical thinkers have changed the views about the representation of women in different walks of life. Yet the 'dark lives' of the courtesans or *tawaifs* have attracted the attention of very few. My paper will also attempt to unpack and reclaim their quest and desire for a dignified identity by taking into account the metamorphosis of these women who are 'multiply marginalized' on account of mechanism of patriarchy and society. It may be argued that the choice of courtesans or *tawaifs* as focus of attention tends to be restrictive and lopsided as these marginalized women have always been presented in negative light. One may argue the feminist identity of courtesans who themselves are responsible for bringing disgrace to the entire species of women. A post colonial feminist critic cannot, however, so easily turn a deaf ear and blind eye to these women. Post colonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well being.¹ As a political phenomena and practice, post colonial feminism aims towards the emancipation and empowerment of women in every walk of life. My study directs attention on the courtesans' awaking consciousness and their confrontation against male dominated, traditional society. The lives of courtesans in both these works can be seen as spectrum representation of the ways dealing with the binary opposition of male verses female, of *tawaif* verses women of high class.

For a proper and amnesia free perspective of the institution of courtesans or *tawaifs*, it is necessary to turn the pages of history.

- **Haris Qadeer** received his Ph.D. in English from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

WOMEN AS OUTSIDERS IN THE MIDDLE PLAYS OF HENRIK IBSEN

Poonkodi Shrri

Henrik Ibsen, frequently spoken as the “father of modern drama” wrote plays dealing with problems of contemporary middle-class life and with the plight of individuals victimized by repressive societies. Although his social doctrines are no longer revolutionary, his portraits of humanity in conflict and dissolution remain timeless. Ibsen, the modernist, depicted the chasm between the rational and the irrational in the twisting and turning of his conflicted heroine. His middle plays, especially, hinge upon a secret in the past that insists on being revealed in the present often with explosive force, triggering a conflict between deadening social conventions and inner vitality. The female protagonists in the middle plays of Ibsen are outsiders in their society; they find unhappiness in an environment that forces them to live inauthentically. They are involved with unsuitable men as Rosmer, Wangle, Tesman and Hjalmar, who lack the passion to respond to their women’s needs. As a result, all three women have focused their attention towards a substitute figure, except Gina Hansen in *The Wild Duck*. Rebecca has invented for herself an idealized Rosmer who bears little resemblance to the actual man, Ellida recalls her dream lover from the past and Hedda focuses her attention on Lovborg.

Rebecca West arrives at Rosmersholm in the notion of being an idealistic companion to Rosmer, threatens his wife, Beata as she is childless and drives her to the state of neurosis. Rosmer becomes morbidly infatuated with Rebecca. Rebecca is highly attracted by Rosmer’s ideals and principles; they have a striking similarity as voracious readers. The intellectuality in Rebecca draws Rosmer close to her. By doing this, Rebecca creates her own world of living in Rosmersholm, never feels guilty for driving Beata to neurosis and ultimately to suicide. Rebecca lives in an eerie atmosphere of fancying white horses in the bungalow.

- **Ms. N. Poonkodi Shrri** is Senior Lecturer in English at Dr. N.G.P. Arts & Science College, Coimbatore.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

FEMINISM IN ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

Sandeep Kumar Sharma

Feminism is a socio-political movement for the freedom of women in a male dominated society. A feminist is one who propagates the cause of women. In India feminism is not only as old as Sita but can also be seen in Sati, wife of Lord Shiva. She not only set aside her husband's wish and advice against participating in the *Yajna* organised by her father but also avenged her husband and her own insult by jumping into the *Yajna*. A number of examples can be seen in Hindu mythology where women asserted their supremacy for instance Sita without whom '*Ashwamedha*' *Yajna* was incomplete or Draupadi whose pride and honour was one of the main reasons for the battle of Mahabharata or Mata Gujri whose single verdict made Guru Gobind Singh sacrifice his four sons.

The feminist movement was championed by those who revolted against the sexiest image of woman in patriarchy and her consequent socio-economic exploitation based on female biological essentialism. A feminist believes that woman has a potential for action, a passion for liberation and a desire to assert herself. Many Indian novelists focus on women's situation in Indian society.

Anita Desai is one of the leading voices to have given a graphic description of the woman's inner world, her sensibility, her sulking frustration and the storm raging inside her mind. The central theme of her novels is the existential predicament of woman as an individual. She has written novel after novel about the miserable condition of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands. Her novels are known for the exploration of the inner recesses of the mind of a woman. If we examine her characters we will find that Desai's focus is on disintegration in the inner and the outer lives of her women characters Anita Desai's protagonists, chiefly Indian women, belong to various age groups and are in constant conflict with society. She puts stress on the emancipation of women and the necessary steps to be taken for it. Like Lawrence, she also believes in the growing awareness among women of their rights and individualities.

- **Sandeep Kumar Sharma** is Lecturer in English at D.M. College, Moga (Punjab).

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

MAGIC AND MEMORY IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *LOVE MEDICINE*

Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri

This paper attempts a reading of Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* as being representative of the story cycle genre and enacting the "communal memory" in literature. It will examine one selected episode from the text in order to situate the contemporary story cycle inside a dual frame which embraces both Western and non-Western traditions, at the same time that its unique elements of the psychic and fantastic help locate the reader within these two literary heritages.

The story cycle as a genre has attracted critical interest in recent years, spurred by the increase in contemporary writers exploring the unconventional form. Though some scholars have briefly discussed story cycles by writers from different ethnic backgrounds, most critics continue to locate the story cycle genre firmly within a Western tradition, identifying its characteristic fragmentation as a postmodern feature. Yet the genre has clear affinities to oral traditions and to the projects of retrieving communal memory and building community, so prominent in what we designate as "ethnic" literatures. Although it is possible to trace their ancestry to the *Canterbury Tales*, the sonnet cycles and other linked narratives through centuries, story cycles also appropriate an oral tradition passed down through alternatives to the written word - mother's lullabies, stories stitched onto quilts, fireside tales, folksongs and other popular mediums. When Erdrich enacts experimental modes that appear to replicate postmodern strategies, she melds these with a long-standing and oral heritage of inclusion and continuity. And it is at this juncture of postmodern experimentation with oral and communal traditions that the contemporary story cycle becomes most radical.

The unusual structure of the story cycle lends itself to experiments in form and content as it is made up of individual text-pieces that exist discretely as stories acting together to produce a broader "novel-like" narrative. A common departure is in the text's chronological pattern.

- **Dr. Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri** is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

**FACES AND FACADES:MAHESH DATTANI'S
*BRAVELY FOUGHT THE QUEEN***

Srideep Mukherjee

Mahesh Dattani's purpose as a playwright is to attempt a realistic understanding of human relations by studying how conflict can be presented on stage. Such a Shavian observation naturally signposts an iconoclastic challenge to conveniently holistic constructs of 'Indianness' as the key area of the dramatist's concern. In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, Dattani concentrates upon the politics of power that lurk beneath patriarchal notions of fixed gender roles and a proliferation of the hyperbolic versions of 'man' and 'woman'. The play dramatizes the hollowness in the lives of women virtually cloistered in gaols, and unscrupulous men perpetrating brutalities of sorts; in the process blurring the lines between fantasy and reality as the characters stand on the brink of terrible secrets, deceptions and hypocrisies.

Dattani's commitment to his purpose of revealing the hiatus in the lives of his characters begins right at the conceptual level. By dovetailing the dramatis persona into thematic groups primarily on gender basis (at least in the first two Acts), he shows his realistic perception of gender identity as being socially determined. On the face of it such a presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. It, therefore, goes by conventional expectations that women keep to the hearth, leading claustrophobic lives, while men have the outdoor space of the office which allows them liberties that go beyond the professional field of activity, leaving ample scope for waywardness. But all this is just a fictional construct that the dramatist builds up to delve into deeper issues.

While the comedy of manners type world of the women in the first Act of the play would suggest a seemingly prosperous business family, the second Act actually bares their dwindling financial position and the unscrupulousness of the brothers in matters pertaining to business and personal life.

- **Srideep Mukherjee** is Lecturer in English at Bajkul Milani Mahavidyalaya in West Bengal.

Note: For complete article contact remarkings@hotmail.com

BOOK REVIEW

***An Armless Hand Writes* by K. K. Srivastava. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd., 2008, 176 pp. Rs. 250.**

An Armless Hand Writes is K. K. Srivastava's second collection of poems. While Srivastava's lyrical short poems show polish and finish, several longer poems have a muscular elegance and a clean economy of line. There is never the sense of trying to squeeze in too much knowledge or experience. Srivastava employs divergent and expansive rhythms and an opening out of sense to myriad possibilities. Even though his work is very personal, and encompasses numerous personal threads, it is not difficult work.

In his lengthy Preface, Srivastava writes of the position he sets up for himself when writing, "Only precondition I put forth before myself, while assessing these ideas as reasonable or otherwise, is that these ideas must be formed of indissoluble substance, capable of self-reflexion, self-doubts and be in a position to grapple with the philosophical issues that deal with complex relationships between the whole and the parts and *vice versa* and yet more complex relationships between cohesive primordial instincts and incoherent and errant reason running beneath sophistication lacking both in intellect and intuition." We will see in this collection how Srivastava meets these conditions he sets for himself.

Most of the fifty-one poems express the angst of contemporary man within the context of interaction between the conscious and unconscious aspects of humanity. Yet there is also a need to try and anchor himself between those places where, "we float between real and unreal: ("Oppressiveness of Nothingness"), a lengthy poem in 39 sections. In Part 2 the poet says,

*I wish I could have blank memory.
No nostalgia.
An infinitesimal imagery.
But what if these nasty erasures don't work now,
these are redundant and obscure,
these have left nothing to us.
I feel so oppressed,
I proceed with my vision blurred
and*

*traces of my identity unfurled.
Ensconced past and continuing present
traverse together sightlessly long,
thorny stretches,
stillness of travesties of raucous
past falls away.*

The need for permanence, and the unreliability of days “unfilled: whole, incomplete,” (“Vexations”) seem to be what impels him to record these poems of insurmountable problems concerning himself and his place in the world. In the three-part poem “Thy Face; Great Anarch,” we meet the three Graces: beauty, gentleness and grace, whose charms enter the poet’s mind and inspire his writing:

*Thy glittering face foists upon me dazzling
endowments of desires,
magnanimously,
inspiring ecstasies to crowd
the aligned corners of my mind
and I add fiercely to the tyranny of my memory
flame of innocence.*

But alongside his eye for beauty, and insight, there is also, in some poems, a depth of feeling (“Old Man And His Conflicts”), and again, in “Disintegrated Self” when describing himself and the fears and anxieties we all face from time to time:

*Attachment to self.
Detachment from self.
And growing between them,
indifference.
T. S. Eliot completes his three conditions,
conditions looking alike yet differing completely,
flourishing “in the same hedgerow.”*

“Confusions” is a lonesomely sad poem, and so in a different way is the poem “Grotesque Masks” where what might previously have been seen as the pleasure of “cheery faces” becomes a nightmare of peoples’ imperfections: “The masks, / crowned on triumphal chariot, / and / we whimper, at / their protozoic grotesqueness.”

Srivastava’s work is essentially that of the observer, and the human feeling and nightmarish qualities with which he imbues some of these poems are part of the artistic life-journey he has undertaken. The poems in this collection can be seen as stopping-points on that

journey towards discovering the intricate relationship between the poet and the way in which he perceives the world. Within these tightly controlled poems, a good example of Srivastava's work at its most powerful might be the 15-part poem "Oh! That One Year Get-together And Our Very Own, Mr Monsieur Maillard" which develops an understanding of the lives lived by certain characters from literature. For example, here is a passage from part 4, "Dawn Breaks Out," which contains a quote from Edith Sitwell's *The Little Ghost Who Died For Love*:

*"Good, good," someone cried,
from inside the dining hall,
loud voice and a louder laughter,
the short, thin, bearded, the anglicized
chap entering the hall, adding his laughter
to that voice.
Inside life had started searching itself.
The blizzard last night had left
young cheeks, younger and rosier.
The moustached, bulky fellow felt cozier.
Everyone was doing the same thing,
Talking, giggling, gossiping, planning,
the ogler kept ogling.
The excitement knew no bounds.
I had landed in a place, a place
where "Though cockcrow marches crying of false dawns
Shall bury my dark voice, yet still it mourns,
Among the ruins . . ."*

Srivastava is a traveller in unforeseen places, and one with an interest in literature, but it is the past which he seeks in everything he observes, not as a refuge from the traumas of the present, but as a confirmation that the barbarian has always been just outside the door, where the poet, melancholy and alone, says: "I noticed my insides being/ rolled out, / a bleak desire overshadows me/ and I tell my tears to/ smile at their fate" ("Etiolated Desires").

Many of these poems are tightly shaped, yet at their heart there is a cynicism, a subversion of the dream, both the romantic and the modernist dream, but with little faith in either. The linguistic skill and tightly controlled shapes of some of the longer poems give the desperate something to hold onto in the broken world. There is strong

work here, especially in a poem such as “An Unfinished Journey” (Part 1):

*We write our most beautiful lines
in solitude of two extremes,
one that reveals nothing, posing no
threat to us and
the other that secretes compulsive
self-revelations.
We are detached from none of the two
but utility of detachment is one thing
and futility of detachment another,
both extending to each other,
both quarrelling with their own form,
both vying with each other
both obsessed by pushy self-questionings
of their very own.
We live in these two extremes,
separately, lacking in,
“a dialogic relationship.”*

The visionary quality in these poems can seem astonishing in its range, its depth, its complexity. The rootedness in the local landscape is no limitation; a connectedness to history, literature, and humanity, runs through these poems, as in “Eroded Memories”:

*Where are those glimpses we survive by?
And also survive by the shuddering visions,
we perch upon.
Don't hide yourself in dwarfed depths.
These are exhausting concealments where odyssey
neither the glimpses nor the visions;
you keep philosophising
the unusual games of innocence and ignorance,
concealments exhausted.*

And in the very next poem we find the poet alone in an empty room: “I stood in an empty room/ but couldn't find sun rising, / air flowing, rains falling,/ winds blowing, sands flying,/ leaves drying, birds singing,/ moon sinking, stars falling,/ children weeping, girls singing./ I still wait” (“Seeking Solace In An Empty Room”) reminding ourselves that each of us stands alone. The movement of past and present is set within the empty room, where we wait for it to be filled with “silent music.”

Of especial power is the poem entitled "Riot And The Young Lady" which is set in "Roads, long and narrow, blood-bathed roads" where a young lady comes to mourn: "Reddish traces linger on/ and that young fragile looking lady,/ lost in her remembrance,/ like an unnoticeable cog/ in the gargantuan past called/ precious history,/ and suddenly asks: / "That's vile – should we a parent's faults adore,/ And err, because our fathers err'd before?" In the poem, the speaker courageously confronts, with stark lucidity, the implicit thoughts that come to mind when contemplating this woman "fragile and thoughtful."

The same unflinching courage appears in "Half-truths"; its topic the lies and deceptions with which one conceals the truth. Facing the moment of truth with an almost harrowing clarity, the poet asks the following question: "What, then, our hopes do hinge on?/ On the tenuous relationship/ Between truths and half-truths./ We look up with longing,/ we are perforated, we look askance at, and having barred all avenues to half-truths/ we have become inscrutably somber." In these unpretentious lines, Srivastava identifies the unspoken language of intense feeling. He acknowledges, moreover, the human desire to testify to the value of life, and to express the way we reflect on ourselves at moments of high seriousness.

"Blissful End" may be one of this collection's best poems. A passionate but never hectoring or dogmatic tone, lends solemnity to lines like the following: "Sometime back, did I not cajole you?/ To join me in my odyssey to the land/ of blissful encroachments./ And then you complained of my/ stirrings riding the panicky/ stars, you thought, that jumped from/ the sky."

The lengthy 3-part poem "Of Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Superfluous People'" discusses those moments when the persona confronts his failings around other people: "Why should I evaluate, reevaluate / things around me? / Is it my business? / We wouldn't alter; change is not / our forte." An interesting variant occurs in "Escapist," in which the poet advises us "to go beyond your fears." The 3-part "Phenomena" takes as its topic the answers that lie buried deeply beneath a veil of questions: "What you call void and what you call/ full happen to be full and happen to/ be void;/ phenomena, creations all happening/ and unhappening all the time."

"Shadows And Lost Relations" (a 6-part poem) tells how the poet carries within himself a variety of emotions and feelings, which he draws upon when writing his poems. These may be feelings of

happiness, love or sorrow or, on the other hand, those of hatred and viciousness: "Sooner or later,/ I will be in a strange whirlpool,/ a whirlpool that neither/ will let me in or out,/ for at the door, ajar,/ will sit my feelings;/ my emotions,/ alive and fresh,/ dried and dead."

In this collection we see much of the modesty, but perhaps also something of the steel, reflected in this poet's verse. Journey through the thoughts, aspirations and reflections of Srivastava's creative life, and you will emerge with a better understanding of his aims and aspirations.

--Patricia Prime

- **Patricia Prime** is a poet based in New Zealand. She is the co-editor of New Zealand haiku journal *Kokako* and Reviews Editor of the ezine *Stylus*. She was honoured with the Poet of the Millennium Award by the International Poets Academy in 2001. She has collaborated with fellow New Zealand haikin, Catherine Mair, on two books of linked verse, *Sweet Penguin* and *First Rays of the Sun*. She has written essays on contemporary Indian English Poetry and on Australian poetry.



***Descending Dark Stairs* by K.S. Pal. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 2007, pp. 54. Rs. 120.**

Descending Dark Stairs is Prof. K.S. Pal's second collection of poems that have been written between 1998 and 2006. In these forty-two poems Pal's imagination flights soar too high as he surveys the social and psychological landscapes with his critical lenses focused on the sham and hypocrisy that appear beneath the façade of amiability, sociability and sophistication which characterize the lives of the denizens of the contemporary modern world. In a number of poems Prof. Pal delineates the oddities, absurdities, eccentricities, incongruities and nastiness of life but nowhere does he seem to display his rancour at the seaminess and nastiness of human life. Instead of being a nay-sayer, he chooses to be affirmative towards the multihued human life.

The poet in Pal boldly and yet apologetically defends his emotional waywardness by punctuating his thought-process with question marks. It is not a medium to dispute but to be ironical and mocking at the politicians and godmen who promise heavenly bliss. In "Law of

Relativity,” the poet views Osama and Bush on the same scale who represent varying versions of truth. In the poem, “Of Leftovers,” the poet travels down the memory lane of his childhood and wonders, “how Krishna could raise on his finger/ a whole solid mountain,/ how Nanak could stop a falling boulder/ with the touch of his palm.” However, at the vantage point of adulthood, he realizes the immense potential of man which could move heaven and earth. Away from the peeping Toms of the adult world, the poet insulates himself in his own secure world as “shadows of love” slowly passed by as his interminable wait for a loving soul to soothe “his life-long sore,” persists, thus driving him to a point of self-disparagement.

Troubled by the sham and hypocrisy prevalent in the world, and tormented by the betrayals and deceptions, the poet takes refuge in the world of memories. Friendship, to the poet, is not “amusing game of shuffling cards at will” as is the case with ultramodern “bright girls and boys” who “swap for fun.” The growing burden of betrayals and family feuds undermines the self-esteem of the poet who has still the urge to live in the warm folds of “familiar arms.”

In this age of fast communication gadgets, the human communication between the elders and their modern adult offsprings, has got severely ruptured. It is a sad critique on the treatment of elders in a family where the old man is “fed on monosyllables of busy sons and their wives” and waits for “crumbs of visits of distant daughters.” In the age of materialism, the perennial joys of life have been robbed, and where man is programmed to produce results “for a peacock tomorrow and left his present to hungry vultures.”

While the poet eulogises childhood when the fancy of the child is unencumbered and unmindful of the storms that rage in the adult world, the old age is free from the worms of envy and yet it makes him vile and ignoble; hence a sharp commentary on the contemporary amoral world. A visit to the holy temple of Kartikaya buttresses the growing awareness in the poet, that in this world “the simple lose the game even before it starts,” and “the crook all win through shrewd short-cuts.” Life is a period of continuous struggle, retirement or employment. The weight of years may make one a tired Tiresias, yet the struggle in life must go on. One must acknowledge, like the poet, to have friends and foes, “to love and hate, all the earthly things to mate and create.” Like “his acute consciousness of his unByronic limp,” the poet knows that life is a game of losses and pain, that has been and may be again. Doubts do assail us all but having loved and lost is

better than not having loved at all. Yet the irrepressible spirit of the poet intones what Bellow's Henderson said, "I want! I want!" The emotional tides like Tsunami will continue to inundate, to wash off the past regrets of loneliness and future fears, though the feeling of loss will never desert the cerebral domains.

The poet, living in the native land of countless Punjabi immigrants, understands the mental agony as they are contemptuously called Pakis who eventually inflict their brand of revenge on the whites "to redeem themselves and their race." Yet these immigrants feel the pangs of their own filial ingratitude to their parents as they fail to "lit the pyre of their parents." Haunted by the feelings of guilt, they see the images of lost parents, and feel tormented "for having mortgaged their soul for a few thousand dollars."

"Under the Other Sky" sums up the strife-saturated life of a working couple whose economic compulsions force them to work. The following lines pithily sum up the tragedy of the working couple who though living under the same roof, does not have free time to interact between themselves and their son: "Our home is a turnstile/ My wife goes out, when I come in, /And my son is usually on his bed." In poem after poem K.S. Pal's sharp focus on idiosyncrasies of the world and personal oddities, the amoral and asocial world of modern man, lack of communication between parents and children, absence of proportion and decency among the modern youth, the highs and lows of old age, the emotional scars and emotional needs, is unwavering. The social and psychological survey, captured through crisp images, is informed by the simplicity of the language, urgency of the situation and efficacy of the modicum.

Reading *Descending Dark Stairs* has been personally a rewarding and enriching experience.

-- **T.S. Anand & Silky Khullar-Anand**

- **Dr. T.S. Anand** is Principal at G.G.N. Khalsa College, Ludhiana. **Silky Khullar-Anand** has completed her post graduation in English from Panjab University, Chandigarh.



***Vibrant Moments Vol. III* by Arunachalam Angapan. Bhubaneswar: The Home of Letters, 2006, pp.61. Rs 150.**

Dr. Arunachalam Angapan is an eminent Indian English poet whose voice startles and attracts the attention of contemporary people. He has a remarkable academic and professional career to his credit, is the author of three books, *Vibrant Moments*, *Vibrant Moments Vol. II* and the current volume.

Arunachalam is a man, belletrist, poet and patriot. Deterioration in academics rouses feelings of annoyance and indignation in him. He is distressed by low politics, corrupt bureaucracy, tilting judiciary, sentimental press, bonded academia, bigoted preachers, effeminate electorate as he finds them corrupt, selfish, vengeful and rotten. Even more, the laws are rigid for the poor. The rich make use of it at their own will. The thugs enjoy power while the meek find no way out. The quantum and intensity of his feeling can be fathomed in the lines: "Nobody cares to correct the system/ That is sans morals, ethics, fairplay." He finds himself all alone in the marching swift foot of time, challenged by unavailable remedy for the maladies. People are so much engrossed in their daily chores, problems, tight schedules and hectic lives that he bemoans: "Time flees/ I stand and stare/ Lost in the cacophony/ That is contemporary life./ No takers for wares of revolution."

The title of the poem "Is it My Country?" speaks for itself. The poet asks questions like: Are constitution, laws and by-laws, rules and sub-rules, sections and sub-sections for the people of the country or the people for them? Effortlessly, we see that the rogues are at large getting all kinds of comforts whereas the innocents are at loggerhead. Equality eludes the common man. Disparity in the country is palpable. The rich and powerful never care for laws and rules. It is a matter of letter and not of spirit. Once again the poet poses a potent question: "Should I call this my country?" Deterioration in judiciary and bureaucracy compels him to pray to God, who appears to be the only Saviour of the country and its people: "God save my country and people."

People of the world may broadly be divided into three classes: the poor, the middle and the upper classes. They consider the other as fortunate, blessed and happy. It's an irony of fate of the people which is being focused in the poem, "The Elusive Happiness." A new harmful culture has developed within these folds that they are not contented

and satisfied with what they have. The poet ridicules their self-afflicted agony. In "The Hypocrite" the poet prays to allow him to live amidst beasts, but not among men because they have turned the beastliest of creations.

The situation of the country has turned from bad to worse. The sole hope of any change is in the hands of youth. The history witnessed the power of youth when our motherland was slave under the regime of the British; the youth were addressed to break the yoke of slavery; the response was immense. They are powerful in all ages, considered a might. So the poet also addresses the youth in the poem "Raise the Banner of Protest: Oh, youth!" where Arunachalam asks the youth to raise the banner of protest to demolish the corrupt, crooked and conscienceless and save the world from the misrule of a miniscule minority that puts self above everything.

The poet is fearless and ferocious, unperturbed by political clouts and bureaucratic red tapes. He delivers a scathing attack on their dubious roles:

*The system would over exalt
Vandals, thugs, murderers,
Elevate them to be rulers;
The "yes, boss" bureaucrats do
High profile offences pushing
The honest down the ladder.*

Who is there to stop the misrule of a miniscule minority that consider themselves above everything? The poet has unflinching faith in the youth and he expresses hope that the intellectuals can save the world from them. Make hay, he says, otherwise next generations will have to face the brunt of these vultures.

The poet talks of erosion in the education system in "Requiem." He wonders how academics shrewdly manage to raise "the portals of this seat of learning in science, arts, commerce and management?" Being a professor himself, the poet would certainly have closely watched all these sordid affairs. The venomous atmosphere was cultivated and nurtured in the premises of the Temple of Learning; as a result, the vexed ones walked out one by one and left the grave philosopher of dubious merits the whole master. It was a severe blow to the well knit academic atmosphere. The poet delineates the present scenario of the institution: "Let him, the tyrant of a grandson,/ Sit and reap the harvest ex-gratia/ Cashing in on the helplessness of the/ Hapless students and parents." They have become absolute power and no one is there to

oppose them because they are supported by a coterie of non-academic thugs and vassals; and they go to any length to take unbridled revenge. They are so cunning that "shameless loot," "forced donation" and "unjust fees" are justified on some pretext or the other. The poet's heart sinks seeing these people who have usurped the centre of learning. He urges the dedicated teachers to realize their duty, kindle the spirit of justice and fair play that will destroy the misrule. They shall feel themselves as cannon balls of justice, custodians of culture, guards of conscience, guardians of destiny, moulders of character, heroes of history, storehouses of knowledge, destroyers of evils and agents of change when there are so many insurmountable evils yoked together in one evil person; in short, honesty of the teaching fraternity is sufficient to behead all evils.

"A Plea for a Civilization New" is a reaction against existing human culture. The capacity of forbearance has touched the apex of extremity and the human being has reached its nadir; that is why the poet invokes Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in the same breath. He tells Brahma that "man has outwitted You." He asks Vishnu to awake and arise to create a world new. And finally tells Shiva that "it is time, ripe and apt to wipe the civilized man off the face of earth."

The world is wise enough to decide who is great and who is mean, who inspires or conspires, who constructs or demolishes, who is evil or angel, who is innocent or guilty? The poem, "The Paradoxes of War" reflects on the proposition that war wagers do not fight; they simply shed false tears for the sufferers. It is hypocrisy that peace preachers monger war. The poet directly criticizes the U.S. and the Europeans for their dehumanized activities. Their roles and intentions are suspicious. Pages of history will never conceal their bloody hands.

Arunachalam does not deal only with corruption, selfishness, crime, bribe, war, bloodshed, exploitation, suppression and disintegration, but also with love. "To My Coy Love" and "You'll Love Me Tomorrow" show that he has soft feelings in his heart for the fair sex. How exquisitely he expresses his love "the sparrows in embrace" and "the bee is diving at the flower." According to him, there is no life without love and love without life. Love is not a "vice" but a "virtue" to him. Those people who term the word 'love' abusive are rash and ash. They are harbingers of violence, they wage wars, spread hatred, raise walls of discrimination, suppress human rights; they are arrogant, egotists, hypocrites, malicious devotees of power and centre of all evils. They

do not know what needs love, must learn that a heart needs a heart to beat in rhythm, and love is divine and love blooms to chime.

Poetic art is after all an embodiment of spirit and a vehicle of thought and feeling. And it is from the character of the spirit, thought, and feeling which it expresses that it derives its substantial and sublime value and thereby the value of the poet. Arunachalam is a poet who wishes welfare of human beings so that life on earth acquires a higher potency and value. How can we imagine poetry if there is absence of life, love, peace, faith, trust, fraternity, humanity, happiness, prosperity etc.?

Arunachalam's poetry excels not only in formal beauty, but also in emotional colour. It is expressed in condensed as well as in descriptive form - one feeling, one idea, or one emotion which is the perfect reflection of his heart that he invariably feels for the human beings, the chiselled creation of Almighty. What he thinks in mind comes to the heart and takes shape; it is something heart rending and beyond the common and average men; it flows out of calibre and courage *sui generis*.

This volume is really a showcase of his time wherein Arunachalam has carved out an interesting niche for himself. The salient features of his poetry include sobriety of art, penchant for simple words, clarity of thought, and brevity of expression. I feel the readers will find in these poems a connecting thread, which is man's ultimate desire for freedom and awakening. Each and every poem possesses potentials of guiding force, highlighting maladies with remedies, and thus redeems us.

--Shujaat Hussain

- **Dr. Shujaat Hussain** is a literary critic, writer and poet based in Aligarh. He is the recipient of the Poets International Best Poetry Critic award for the year 2007.



***The Partition: A Novel* by Sucha Nand. Washington, D.C.: Information Institute Publishing, 2007, pp. 211.**

The senseless killings of Hindus and Sikhs in the undivided Punjab, especially the West Punjab, and the massacre of Muslims, the mass exodus of people on both sides, the heartrending scenes of partings and killings, the sporadic exhibition of humanness by the members of the two principal communities toward one another--all these socio-

political causes & effects permeate the narratives on the partition of India—Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Bhisham Sahani's *Tamas*, B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, Balwant Singh Anand's *Cruel Interlude*, Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, Chaman Lal's *Azadi* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*.

The Partition: A Novel by Dr. Sucha Nand, a Professor of Medicine, Loyola University of Chicago, Stritch School of Medicine, is another notable addition to the still growing body of fiction on the theme of Partition. The writer was born in independent India but the agony and pain experienced by his ancestors, the legacy of psychological scars borne by his relatives, and the nostalgic remembrance of the glorious days of homogeneity among the inhabitants of cities and villages on both sides of the international border between Pakistan and India, constitute the essence of the narrative. The writer focuses on the momentous event in the contemporary history of mankind when two Nations/Countries carved out on the basis of religion, emerged on the map of the world, thus causing untold misery to millions of people who lost their homes and hearths, and became refugees.

Sucha Nand's *The Partition: A Novel*, though a story of two friends Ram Dass and Chaman Lal, is essentially the story of innumerable Hindus. Sikhs and Muslims were living together peacefully until the demonic political forces tore asunder the delicate social fabric which was so assiduously put in place by the sense of tolerance demonstrated by the people on both sides of the communal divide. Amidst arson, loot and murder, Ram Dass and Chaman Lal, emaciated and hungry for days, brave all the dangers, hide themselves in bushes and wild growth along the canal, resume their trek to freedom at night, eventually scream with joy as they realize that they had entered Hindustan, and seek refuge in Bangli, a village in Indian Punjab, in 1947. The two young and irrepressible friends, in a fit of rage, quarrel, and unfortunately part. Ram Dass goes to Delhi while Chaman Lal stays put in Bangli. The communication between the two snaps, though each one regrets the incident and is penitent. As the narrative unfolds, Ram Dass, having settled in Delhi, returns to Bangli in 1975 in search of his long-parted friend, Chaman Lal. Through flashback techniques, the novelist describes the entire sequence of events leading to the disturbances in the West Punjab, the rise of the Muslim League and the eventual breakdown of social harmony which fanned a wave of insecurity among the Hindus and Sikhs in Tande, a village near Lahore (Pakistan) as it was surrounded by Muslim-dominated villages. What was feared and abhorred most by the people eventually

happened as people clutched at each other's throats, some to defend and others to loot and kill. In a letter to Dr T.S. Anand, Sucha Nand ruefully admits that Partition "was a tragedy born out of pettiness and selfishness of national leaders, haste and indifference of the rulers and utter thoughtless and lack of planning by all."

The most refreshing thing about Sucha Nand's novel is the novelist's deft handling of the apocalyptic event which triggered off a vicious chain of reprisal killings of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the name of religion. By placing the narrative between 1947 and 1975, Sucha Nand has skillfully delineated the ecological disaster caused by plantation of eucalyptus trees in Punjab's countryside which resulted in the lowering/depletion of water level in Punjab. The felling of trees and drying of canals posed/still poses a grave danger to the fast vanishing fauna and flora. The novelist has drawn attention to the most depressing menace of environmental pollution which persists in an alarming degree.

The potential richness of Partition as a literary theme has engaged the creative imagination of the writers in English and regional languages of India for more than sixty years, and that it still fascinates the likes of Dr Sucha Nand and Shauna Singh Baldwin speaks of its eternal human relevance.

--**Shalini Gupta & Silky Khullar-Anand**

- **Ms. Shalini Gupta** teaches English at Khalsa College for Women, Sidhwan Khurd, Ludhiana.
- **Silky Khullar-Anand** has completed her post graduation in English from Panjab University, Chandigarh.



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