

Is the future Freudian?

FREUD 2000

Edited by Anthony Elliot

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Introduction

Is the future Freudian? Or are we going to witness the dismantling of psychoanalysis in favour of discourses that will bear only an etiolated relationship to the foundational texts of Sigmund Freud? And, most importantly, has the very success of psychoanalysis been its failure? Has the percolation of psychoanalysis into the cultural unconscious made it impossible as a form of therapy? What must Freudians do to render psychoanalysis into the radical practice that it once was?

Freud 2000 brings together ten essays on the possible uses of Freudian psychoanalysis in the years to come. The Freudians assembled here are not all psychoanalysts, but thinkers in the humanities and the social sciences and are well known for their commitment to the Freudian field. These essays in applied psychoanalysis seek to revive the prestige of psychoanalysis as a form of cultural commentary and justify its relevance in a world suffused with a plethora of images and signs – a world that demands a finer understanding of associational thinking as a basic form of linguistic competence. Since *the unconscious is the site par excellence of associational thinking*, Joanne Brown and Barry Richards (two contributors to this volume) are able to “predict... that beyond 2000 there will be an increasingly wide and sophisticated use of post-Freudian psychoanalytic ideas in the social sciences and humanities, in the study of culture, social process and politics.”

The urgency of this book arises from the continual assaults that Freudian psychoanalysis has been subjected to in recent years both in academic debate and in the popular media in the United States. The vehemence with which Freud has been attacked by erstwhile Freudians like Jeffrey Masson and Frederick Crews is itself perhaps worthy of analysis. What is it about the Freudian cultural legacy that should invite such vehement criticism? Why does Freud continue to inspire so much love and so much hate?

The resistance to psychoanalysis has revolved, one suspects, around Freud's ability to revise cultural history with so much panache that a great deal of it appears but an

anticipation of his own work. Hence the violent oscillations that mark the careers of the Freud lovers, the Freud haters, and the Freud bashers. They are fascinated by the scope of Freud's ambition but repulsed by his very human limitations.

Here, the Freud lovers attempt to address three traditional philosophical problems that pertain to the subject, object and means of knowledge. In other words: Who knows? What is known? How is it known? As Anthony Elliot puts it in his introduction: “Freudian psychoanalysis is of signal importance to three major areas of concern in the social sciences and the humanities, and each of these covers a diversity of issues and problems. The first is the *question of human subjectivity*; the second is that of *social analysis*; and the third concerns *epistemology*. These concerns are at the heart of *Freud 2000*.”

The Clinical and the Cultural

In other words, psychoanalysis is not reducible to what goes on between the doctor and patient. Most schools of psychoanalysis belabour this point at every given opportunity. Lacan's influential heir, Jacques-Alain Miller, has argued in his *Extimité* seminar (1985-86) that “for analysts, referring only to the analytic experience is illusory for Freud's and Lacan's works are also part of our relation to psychoanalysis.” It appears then that it is not just the doctor who inspires the transference, but the discourse as well. Psychoanalysis, as Anthony Elliot is keen to point out early in the volume, is a discourse that can help us to frame the “psychic orientation of social practices.” This expansion of the psychoanalytic ambit (in Elliot's definition) also means that unlike the physical sciences, which seek to demarcate their concerns with rigour, psychoanalysis is making itself vulnerable to the charge that it is moving away from its ‘core competence’ in clinical work. The answer to that charge from the point of view of this book is that the focus here is not so much on the metapsychology that animates the core of clinical analysis but an attempt to

demarcate the ways in which the Freudian unconscious interferes systematically in the fabric of everyday life. This systematic interference is made possible by the fact that the symbolic meanings of our acts are overdetermined by unconscious processes of which we are not fully aware. As Jacques Lacan points out in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977), most people sympathetic to psychoanalysis rarely appreciate what exactly is at stake in the claim that the unconscious has a structure and that the notion of the unconscious is not a mere romantic font of creativity. In fact, most humanists and lay people who nod appreciatively on hearing the notion of the unconscious being mentioned are thinking of the Jungian (rather than the Freudian) unconscious.

The Freudian Unconscious

What then is this Freudian unconscious that must be rearticulated to prevent its misappropriation in cultural analysis? To prevent its absorption in residual romantic notions that preceded the Freudian articulation? Lacan says quite categorically that “to all these forms of unconscious, ever more or less linked to some obscure will regarded as primordial, to something pre-conscious, what Freud opposes is the revelation that at the level of the unconscious there is something at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject – this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege.” And, most importantly, “I am well aware of the resistances that this simple remark can still provoke, though it is evident in everything that Freud wrote.”

But how do we identify such a moment? Where else does this moment lie but in, what Lacan terms, the “sense of impediment?” It is in the moment of “impediment, failure, split,” that the unconscious reveals its logic of interference. Freud finds failure interesting because it reveals a structure that is Other to the subject. “Freud is interested in these phenomena and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realised – which appears intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is produced, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious.”

The Impossible Professions

Should not the political realm then be the privileged site for the revelations of the unconscious? Or rather in the revelation that it has a systematic structure of interference that is marked by “impediment, failure, and split?” Was not politics (along with pedagogy and psychoanalysis) one of the *three impossible professions* in the Freudian doctrine? Should it not be to these impossible professions that we must turn to for evidence of the workings of the unconscious that is marked by a *passion for ignorance*, by a resistance to change. Does not the Freudian experience bear witness to the fact that change (be it political or personal) is always marked by resistance when it encounters the desire of the Other? Therein lies surely the trauma of culture, the Freudian discontent in civilisation. The psychoanalytic notion of trauma, for example, will help us to understand not only the impasses in the lonely, alienated human subject but also the savage bouts of irrationality that break out repeatedly on the world's stage in the form of riots, rapes and genocide. By spelling out the relationship between trauma, repetition, and the death drive, psychoanalysis makes it a little more difficult to go into denial about the fact that cultures like individuals would rather *repeat than remember* (the historical trauma).

Freud & Current Affairs

Both individual humans and cultures are equally prey to the death drive that emerges in traumatic situations like the Partition, the recent referendum in East Timor, the genocide in Rwanda, etc. For, wherever there is a gap, or a split, the unconscious will speak. The classic sub-continental symptom from this perspective is Kashmir. What are *the libidinal stakes* in Kashmir that are not reducible to questions of geopolitics or military strategy? How does Kashmir function as a wound that is imbued with a perverse *jouissance* at its core? Unless we address this question and seek to traverse the real of this *jouissance*, there is no possibility of a political breakthrough. There will only be bouts of anxiety when, and if, talks are announced and there is endless posturing about pre-conditions. Again, how are we to undo the damage and bring about a measure of justice to the lives of the people affected by large-scale disruptions? As we approach the end of what is undoubtedly the most violent century in history, can psychoanalysis at least

contd. from p. 7

murdered and Kalicharan implicated in a false case only to flee into the jungles at the end of the novel. Prem Singh faults the novel only on one

count – Renu does not describe the growing peasant-movement of the day.

All in all, Prem Singh has raised more pertinent political questions related to the notions of revolution, freedom, decolonisation and develop-

ment as reflected in the Hindi novel with special reference to Ajneya, Yashpal and Renu in his valuable book. The addition of an updated bibliography will make it more researcher/reader friendly. The book

is, indeed, an important contribution to the politico-cultural criticism of the modern Hindi novel.

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give us a clue to the psychopathology of these aberrations, if not cure them?

This book argues that it can. If one wished to be formulaic, we can simply say that this book *marks a transition in the fortunes of psychoanalysis*. While in the twentieth century, psychoanalysis brought out the inherent *violence in sexuality*, in the twenty-first century it will seek to expose the intrinsic *sexuality in violence*. As Fred Alford, one of the contributors, points out in his essay on 'Freud and Violence': "Freud is not just a metaphysician of violence and destruction. He is an observer, operating on the quite simple, non-metaphysical premise that *if people do it so much, they must like it*. There would be nothing surprising about this argument if it were about sex. Why does it still surprise about violence?" As globalisation accelerates the movement of peoples around the globe, giving rise to ethnic and cultural conflicts, it might help to keep this in mind. As Elliot insists, "every life, every activity, every event, every social or cultural practice is constituted and reproduced through representational and affective modes of psychic processing."

What, after all, is a culture? Is it not but a specific method of regulating the placement, use, and *jouissance* of human bodies? Where else (but in Freudian psychoanalysis) will we find a specific theory of this *jouissance*? A *jouissance* that insists beyond the pleasure principle in a perverse enjoyment of suffering itself? Is it not to Freud that we must turn in order to understand that the "world is, in the most general sense, at once an imaginative and social-historical project?"

What are these Freudian Futures?

Let us try to envisage the contributions that psychoanalysis can make to the so-called 'new-world order'. Given that Freudian psychoanalysis is not inherently geared towards a particular political agenda, how can we deploy its insights in ways that do not merely legitimate the dominance of the right or console the left? After all, both the leftist program of Freudo-Marxism in Europe and the rightist reduction of psychoanalysis to ego psychology in the United States have not borne fruit. I think one way of doing so would be to note, after Jacques Lacan, that psychoanalysis is not about economic production, it is not a method of increasing productivity either through an endorsement of free market capitalism or socialist planning. Lacan makes this quite clear in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60). This is because neither the left nor the right is willing to come to terms with the *tragic constitution of the human subject*. This becomes necessary because the attempt to use psychoanalysis in political projects cannot remain untouched by the libidinal

underpinnings of emancipatory critiques. In Elliot's formulation: "a reading of the emancipatory dimensions of Freudian psychoanalysis which is more in keeping with a radical postmodern perspective is one in which desire is viewed as integral to the construction of alternative selves and possible collective futures. In this reading, it is not a matter of doing away with the distorting dross of fantasy, but rather of responding to, and engaging with, the passions of the self as a means of enlarging the critical imagination."

Psychoanalysis and Orientalism

An example of how fantasy structures the critical imagination is Orientalism. Steve Pile, one of the contributors, takes up the challenge of situating the ways in which the Freudian theory of fantasy might help us to deconstruct the imaginative geographies of the Orient. In his contribution to this volume entitled 'Freud, Dreams and Imaginative Geographies,' Pile engages with the possibility of bringing together the discipline of human geography with psychoanalysis. He does this by examining the use of Freudian dream analysis in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Pile's take on Said is that "the analogy between the production of dream-space and the production of space as dream-like holds better once a fuller understanding of Freud's spatial imagination is appreciated." This fuller understanding will help us to realise that "there can be no decolonisation as such, but only the re-working of spatial relationships – so that the point of political action is not to seize space, but to transform it."

The transformation of space implies that the dream, which Freud dubbed "the royal road to the unconscious," is not a static object. It is in its ability to impact on the space of geography, in the so-called dream work, in the *transformational grammar of the unconscious* that we must seek a better understanding on the availability of the Freudian model as a tool to deconstruct the imaginative geography of the Orient. After all, as Pile points out, Said appears to be resistant to pushing this model for what it is worth. "If Said was briefly taken with a Freudian scheme for interpreting Orientalism, then he quickly abandons this in favour of a more Foucauldian analysis of the shift from one Orientalist 'vision' to another." By hesitating at this point, Said is not merely losing out on the dynamic sense of the latent/manifest content opposition that is implied in the Freudian model of dream work. He also fails to identify the constitutional ambivalence that attends the encounter between the coloniser and colonised, necessitating a corrective that was introduced by Homi Bhabha.

Since it is this constitutional ambivalence that animates the subject when it encounters the *jouissance* of the Other and which propels it into the modalities of mimicry and mockery, it appears that there are advantages in holding on to the Freudian model for at least a while longer. For at the scene of this ambivalence "is both fear and desire: fear of the other, desire for the other." But insofar as ambivalence is a constitutive feature of subjectivity, a psychological representation of the linguistic problem of ambiguity – given that the unconscious is structured like a language – does it not compel a larger understanding of the encounter that is instantiated in this example as that of coloniser versus colonised? Would not Hegelians understand the conflict as one between Master and Slave in the fight for symbolic recognition? Or Freudians notice that this model is resonant of the oedipal encounter where Father and Son are locked in an ambivalent quest for power to define ultimately the nature of Law?

Psychoanalysis & Law

I will conclude with a brief examination of David Caudill's essay on 'The Future of Freud in Law' as it dramatises the question of whether psychoanalysis has any place in jurisprudence given its problematic status as a science. Caudill is an American law professor and is committed to asking whether Freud, who has for decades been exiled from legal scholarship, will return to mainstream jurisprudence and, if so, in what form. The Freudian exile from jurisprudence is odd given that psychoanalysis has had a major impact on critical and cultural theory – discourses that are not without an influence on the critical legal theory movement. So how is it that Freud becomes an object of repression? Another way of asking this question is this: *What is it about psychoanalysis that is being evaded in legal theory?* Rather, in the practice of law, since some of the best minds in the legal academy have turned to psycho-analysis of late?

Pierre Legendre, a French legal historian (influenced by Jacques Lacan) and Peter Goodrich, his English editor, have argued that the resistance to Freud may have to do with the fact *the law itself has an unconscious*. Like psychoanalysis, the law too has to address whether it is a science, whether it has a logical structure, whether logical coherence is synonymous with a science or whether the law is just a set of contingent practices. Again, attempts have been made in the law as in psychoanalysis to use everything from moral philosophy to hermeneutics to elide the embarrassment of the fact that it can never be a science. Like psycho-analysis, the law too has had its deconstructors and debunkers who fight shy of building

theories and are content to merely work on the plane of practice.

The influential pragmatist tradition of the common law that is best personified in the spirit of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the U.S. Supreme Court, who decisively framed the law as a matter of experience, of *trial and error* (in more ways than one) rather than one of logic and science has made a great deal of legal theory redundant in American law schools. While this irreverent, pragmatist tradition continues in the heady mixture of law and economics that is represented by the contemporary jurisprudence of Judge Richard Posner, it is difficult to believe that Freud will actually make a comeback in legal theory. Nevertheless, the difficulty in envisaging a future for Freud in law does not amount to dubbing psychoanalysis irrelevant. It may even be that it is precisely the ease with which psychoanalysis has been repressed in legal discourse that will give us a fundamental clue to the debates ahead. The task for those who wish to do legal theory influenced by the psychoanalytic notion of law is perhaps to focus on the ways in which Freudian metapsychology helps to frame *both the subjectivity of law and the law of subjectivity*.

The burden of proof is on the legal theorist to demonstrate that the unconscious (in Legendre's contention) acts like a lawyer. Given the excessive pragmatism that attends legal discourse, surely the onus is on the Freudians to demonstrate how insights into the nature of the unconscious can make us into better and more ethical lawyers. After all, did not Lacan situate the unconscious in the plane of ethics rather than in alternate ontologies? Are we to be content, like the deconstructionists, with merely bringing out the fact that the institution of law proceeds from a repression of its 'originary violence'? Should not legal theorists instead find the Real of law in the impossibility of its practice? Though Caudill doesn't push the argument in this direction, I think the future of Freud in law will depend on the ability of psycho-analytic jurisprudence to take on the law and economics movement. Surely, it would be ridiculous for Freudians to cackle over the fact that they are not susceptible to fantasies of economic determinism from the left, only to submit tamely to the same argument from the right. *The future of Freud will not be fought out in medicine, but in law*. For in the ultimate analysis, psychopathology is not a demand for a cure, but a plea for justice – in the Lacanian formulation of the 1950's: 'an appeal to the Other.'

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Rabindranath Tagore first visited Germany in 1921 when his popularity there was at its height. By the time he returned in 1926 and then in 1930, the 'Tagore-wave' had dramatically receded as the nascent Weimar Republic lurched its way through seemingly anarchic social, economic and political upheavals towards its end. Martin Kämpchen study of Tagore's reception in Germany focuses on four Germans who played a role at various stages during his visits to Germany and who were key mediators between Tagore and his German audience: the philosopher Hermann Keyserling, the publisher Kurt Wolff, Helene Meyer-Franck who became Tagore's translator, and her husband Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, a professor of literature who wrote interpretations of Tagore's work. Kämpchen attempts, through this study, to highlight certain basic attitudes expressed in Germany towards Tagore as a cultural icon. While doing so, he locates these four admirers of Tagore against a backdrop of shifting popular opinion, of both appreciation and rejection.

The first and longest chapter deals with Hermann Keyserling, a leading figure amongst those German writers who were attracted to India during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Keyserling met Tagore in Calcutta in 1912, then in London in 1913 and finally during Tagore's highly publicised trip through Germany in May-June 1921. He projected himself as the poet's friend and guide and carried on a correspondence with him till 1938, three years before Tagore's death.

Kämpchen rightly sees Keyserling as a representative of an orientalist discourse which saw India and the East as the antithesis of the West. The predominant form of this discourse in Germany had inherited its characteristic features from German Romanticism which was responsible for the first wave of interest in India during the initial half of the nineteenth century. It romanticised India and saw in it the possibility of a radical renewal of the West. This mode of looking at the world is also characteristic of Keyserling's hugely popular *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* (1918), the first part of which deals with his journey through India. Kämpchen points out that of all the literature written during the second wave of German intellectual interest in India, only two books have survived: Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* and Keyserling's *Travel Diary*.

The author suggests three reasons for the friendship between Keyserling and Tagore. Firstly, both men regarded themselves as representing the West and the East respectively. Secondly, both sought a synthesis of

Book Review

Tagore in Germany: Myth and Reality

RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN GERMANY:
FOUR RESPONSES TO A CULTURAL ICON

Martin Kämpchen.

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the West and the East. And thirdly, both attempted to realise their ideas through the establishment of educational institutions, Keyserling through his *School of Wisdom* at Darmstadt and Tagore through his school for children and his international university, the *Visva-Bharati* at Shantiniketan. Despite these common aims, however, Keyserling and Tagore differed fundamentally. Unlike Keyserling, Tagore's conception of his own role as a representative of the East was marked by self-doubt and irony. Moreover, as Kämpchen notes, Keyserling had no social or political objectives, whereas Tagore's idea of an East-West synthesis was rooted in his critique of India's colonial subjection, oppressive social structure and in his universalist concerns and vision. In fact, Keyserling had little real interest in India; he conceived the East-West synthesis as a source of spiritual rejuvenation for himself and for the West.

The differences between Keyserling and Tagore are most vividly illustrated in the comparison made by the author of Keyserling's *School of Wisdom* and Tagore's *Visva-Bharati*. While both were professedly based on an idea of East-West synthesis, certain differences are striking. The *School of Wisdom* was only open to select intellectuals, those predestined to be leaders of the new age of spiritual renewal. It was not merely elitist in access; it was also hierarchical and authoritarian in its conception and detached from its natural and social environment. As against this, *Visva-Bharati* was open to whoever wished to study there, aimed at liberating the students' independent creative abilities, and emphasised the interconnectedness of education with nature and social objectives.

In June 1921, the *School of Wisdom* hosted a Tagore-Week that evidently became such a sensation that it is recalled every year in Darmstadt. Kämpchen gives an account of this week through descriptions of the various programmes, the leading personalities involved, and the enthusiasm and scepticism which it invited. Through this account of Keyserling's assumed role as the high priest of the exotic figure from East, there also emerges a Tagore distinctly

discomfited by his German admirer's overbearing enthusiasm and clearly resistant to being monopolised or used unscrupulously. Keyserling's style also invited the criticism of other writers who were attracted to Tagore. Two facts that Kämpchen records perhaps deserve greater attention. A newspaper report appearing the day after the first evening programme chose to criticise Tagore with the charge that Social Democrats and women were in the majority in the audience. And on the last day Tagore insisted on visiting a group of workers in the Labour Union House despite the initial resistance from Keyserling. Kämpchen's somewhat casual reference to these aspects of Tagore's visit raises questions which his study does not attempt to answer.

It is perhaps worth noting that the second wave of German intellectual interest in India had its roots in the growing sense of crisis in Western civilisation that reached its peak with the unprecedented devastation during the First World War and Germany's humiliating defeat. The quest for a romanticised 'spiritual' India and the political radicalisation both of the working class and of significant sections of the intelligentsia were two responses to this crisis. Lukács' scathing though misplaced criticism of Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) cannot be fairly assessed without an understanding of this crisis. In this context, the interest of 'Social Democrats', women and workers in Tagore might well give evidence of appreciative responses quite different from that of Keyserling.

The second chapter of Kämpchen's study focuses on Kurt Wolff, the publisher who introduced Tagore to the German readers. Wolff published *Gitanjali* in 1914, a year after Tagore received the Nobel Prize. This was followed by several other works of Tagore's, particularly in the period following the First World War when Tagore was seen both as a messenger of peace in a war-ravaged world and specifically in Germany as one who extended brotherhood and solidarity to a people humiliated by defeat and harsh reparations. During this period Wolff seems to have benefited by publishing Tagore. The prestige and

acclaim that this brought him apparently helped him to sell some of the other writers he had patronised including some significant expressionist writers. But the interest in Tagore waned rapidly as the German economy first stabilised in 1924 and the Wolff publishing house itself went into dissolution as the world economic crisis of 1929 hit Germany.

Apart from Tagore's writings, Wolff's inclination for things Eastern was limited to a volume on the Sermons of the Buddha. Unlike Keyserling who had a philosophical conception of the need for some kind of East-West synthesis, Wolff patronised the new forms of writing in German literature of his times. His importance as a German publisher is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that he was the first to publish the writings of Franz Kafka and, in the decades after the Second World War, the one who brought out Günter Grass' *The Tin Drum*.

As Kämpchen describes it, both Kurt Wolff and Hermann Keyserling had business interests, albeit different ones, in promoting Tagore during his first visit to Germany, the one to advertise his publishing house and the other to win support for his *School of Wisdom*. It seems that neither of them was actually much interested in or impressed by Tagore as a poet though Wolff found it worth noting that the poetry was easy to translate. They were charmed rather by Tagore's charismatic personality and saw in it a key to pursuing very different goals.

Of Jewish descent, Kurt Wolff fled Germany in 1933, underwent internment in several French internment camps and finally sought exile in the US from where he returned to Europe only in 1959. In a radio essay on his association with Tagore presented two decades after Tagore's death, Wolff ascribed Tagore's popularity to an interest in Eastern themes at a time of crisis in Western civilisation and drew a link with the "seductive appeal of young Communist Russia to the intelligentsia." Kämpchen not only finds this linking surprising and unusual but also argues that Tagore had, "somewhat naively, fallen for the Soviet Russian version of socialism" since Tagore's utopian vision based on "Indian spiritual idealism" and that of Communism could not have anything in common. This argument is itself surprising since Kämpchen elsewhere notes Tagore's social critique and objectives. Neither is it born out by Tagore's *Letters from Russia* or his *Interview with Izvestia*.

It is a curious fact that most of Tagore's translators were women. While three of them are only named, Kämpchen gives some details of the lives of the first translator, Marie-Luise

Gothein and the major one, Helene Meyer-Franck. Growing up at a time when women were not expected to aspire to a university education or a role in public life, both apparently lived and worked largely in the shadow of their husbands. Nevertheless, they seem to belong to a generation of middle-class women that sought for avenues of emancipation, however limited, in intellectual activity. It seems that Marie-Luise Gothein independently discovered Tagore, translated his *Gitanjali*, and sent the manuscript to Wolff's publishing house for consideration. While it may be unclear whether the motives behind the eventual publication of the manuscript were in any way influenced by the providential announcement of the Nobel Prize, there seems to be no doubt about Gothein's genuine enthusiasm for Tagore's poetry. The same may be said even more forcefully about Meyer-Franck.

The third and final chapter of the study looks at both Helene Meyer-Franck and her husband Heinrich Meyer-Benfey since, as Kämpchen points out, they worked as a team. Both of them learnt Bengali and had plans for some time to move to Shantiniketan. These plans were scotched when the British Government refused to grant them visas. Though largely neglected by Tagore scholars in Germany and

India, Meyer-Franck was not only Tagore's major translator but also the first one to translate directly from the Bengali original. Meyer-Benfey, a philologist and literary historian of considerable repute, might have been put in the shade by Keyserling's flamboyant publicity, but, as Kämpchen explains, his contribution as a Tagore scholar is more than that of anyone else.

Though Kämpchen does not attach any significance to it, Helene Meyer-Franck's first encounter with Tagore's writing was in 1920 with the essay "The Spirit of Japan" and the poem "Sunset of the Century," both of which she immediately translated. The poem with its powerful, apocalyptic but universalist critique of civilisation that is unmistakably not just Western has nothing in it to particularly endear those who would wish to see Tagore as a representative of an Eastern idealism as against a Western materialism. Yet it marks the moment of Meyer-Franck's initial and spontaneous attraction to Tagore's poetry.

What one misses in Kämpchen's study is any discussion of the responses to the form or style of Tagore's writing rather than on views that he held or were attributed to him. One stray remark made by the director of production in Wolff's publishing house gestures unintentionally in this

direction: "The poems were so good and peculiar..." (emphasis added). Evidently, Meyer-Franck was so drawn to what was 'peculiar' to Tagore's writing that she decided to learn Bengali even despite her husband's discouragement. Kämpchen has shown critical appreciation of the fact that this first translator of Tagore from the original Bengali attempted to recreate not only the content but also the form that is inseparable from its "full emotional appeal." However, one would have liked to find some discussion of the literary qualities of Tagore's writing that attracted the German reader at a time when German writers were engaged in intense literary experimentation.

Heinrich Meyer-Benfey was evidently as intense an admirer of Tagore as his wife and wrote the first full-length book about him. He also published the eight volume *Collected Works* along with his wife. Kämpchen contrasts his sober language and balanced appraisal to Keyserling's superlative praise. Kämpchen ascribes this combination of emotional intensity and intellectual sobriety to the depth of Meyer-Benfey's scholarship, and in particular to the fact that Meyer-Benfey was the only person with any Indological training to write on Tagore.

One might add that though Kämpchen legitimately criticises perceptions that stereotype the Occident and the Orient, he himself at times lapses into formulations that are typical of such perceptions. He tends moreover to emphasise in his presentation of Tagore concepts such as harmony and interdependence between East and West and to somewhat underplay the passion and anger in Tagore's social critique as well as his internationalism and universalist concerns that so sharply contrast with the cultural relativism of Keyserling.

The study is evidently based on a great deal of documentary research including letters, newspaper reports, systematic and stray references in the writings of a vast number of people in Germany who met, read or merely heard about Tagore. The author has honestly admitted where he was unable to check the validity of any statement. Written in a lucid language that does not get cluttered despite the large amount of unknown information that it carries, Kämpchen's study gives fresh insights as well as new impulses for further investigation of Germany's encounter with Tagore.

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Simmering between the modernist and postmodernist postures, the poems selected by E.V. Ramakrishnan for *The Tree of Tongues* capture a predominant mood of resistance and anger as much as anguish. The tree stands steadfast on its deep roots, emerging, as it were, from the same mood of protest as evidenced in the medieval poetry of each of the four tongues recorded in this volume. The title of the book is in itself a rich metaphor that draws its meanings from the mythic and the grand narrative of the Malayalam poem by K. Satchidanandan quoted in its English translation in the very beginning:

And the goddess frowned
The goddess lifted the sword
And she chopped off the root

The tongue tree had a gash
The gash spurted blood
The blood sprouted leaves
A thousand tongue leaves
Each leaf put forth truth
All those buried truths were out

Each poem in this collection projects an effort to unravel some buried truth, be it in the insularity of a private consciousness or within the much larger social domain where the personal too becomes the political. Subaltern voices find their much deserving space in this volume, giving vent to suppressed and erstwhile

Book review

The Blossom of Wounded Voices

THE TREE OF TONGUES.

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silenced feelings. "My poetry is a sharp stabbing knife," says Jayant Parmar, the Gujarati poet. Namdeo Dhasal locates an "empire of darkness" in his poem "A Notebook of Poems" in Marathi. While reviewing this volume, Vasantha Surya asks in desperation: "What has happened to poetry? Is Keats being paraphrased? Unbeauty is truth and truth unbeauty!" In poem after poem, this collection throws up images which are surreal and at times even grotesque. There are poems replete with graphic descriptions that can arouse disgust. Where is beauty then to be located in these poems? I believe that the success of most of these poems lies in perceiving beauty in the moments of truth and awareness yielded by them in flashes. On the face of it, they might appear so ugly. Kakkad's poem "Behold These Sheep on the Road," translated by E.V. Ramakrishnan into

a tight and neat poetic idiom, is an appropriate example demonstrating the beauty of a dark vision:

Behold these sheep worming their way
along this unending road, bearing
the butcher's seal on their haunches
like the legacy of a coat of arms

Jostling and kicking each other
mating in the open
teeming and spawning
drifting in dust and din....

With hunger foaming at the mouth
with lust squirming in their loins
crowding and pushing....

As the sheep cease to feel and we cease to feel them, the poet asks the question at the end of the poem, "Do we feel ourselves anymore?"

There is no question of any lofty aloofness in this poetry as found in the poems of the "High Modernists" -

the poets of the earlier generation of modernists. However, a deep sense of loneliness and a pervasive social indifference seem to be at the root of much of the suffering articulated in these poems. The four languages represented in this volume scan a fairly large domain of India, even though there would be so many more different voices emerging in the many other languages.

What this volume tells us effectively is that the poet in India in the post-1960's has come out of his/her privatised self to build connections with the 'other' on the street. Much of the subversive reality suddenly finds voice, thus "making it new." *Making it New: Modernism in the Poetry of Malayalam, Hindi and Marathi* is in fact the title of E.V. Ramakrishnan's earlier book to which *The Tree of Tongues* comes as a companion volume. This does not of course mean that the poems were written later; rather, the poems collected for this volume were written far earlier. The editor modestly and rightly says, "Poetry is not written to illustrate critical arguments." In fact, the strength of E.V. Ramakrishnan's critical responses lies in the very fact that his arguments evolve from within the poetry written in the languages of his study.

The Tree of Tongues is also valuable as an autonomous book meant for

anyone interested in Indian poetry. This immediately brings one's attention to the question of translation. It is a well-known fact that poetry demands a more creative and skilful translator than does prose. This volume succeeds in presenting the translated poems as poems rather than pale and uninspired versions, which merely transmit information and not the essential experience of the poem. The Malayalam section of this book specially offers some examples of excellent translations with E.V. Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan and A.J. Thomas as translators. Here's a sample from Kadammanita Ramakrishnan's long poem "The Pumpkin":

If nothing can be done
let this axis collapse
and let this earth be crushed
like a rotten egg.
Or, let it be frozen
like a still picture.
Let us leave it to its fate.

And let us talk about the pumpkin:

The pumpkin is globular
like the earth.

No, no. Let us not compare the
pumpkin
with the earth.

The pumpkin is like the pumpkin.

And later on in the poem:
The paradox that
even the greatest truths
turn into the most grotesque lies
as they turn into words
and then into actions,
is nauseating.

(Translated by A.J. Thomas)

In the Hindi section, Kedarnath Singh's poems too have found an inspired English rendering in the hands of Pradeep Deshpande and E.V. Ramakrishnan. The translations are both creative and faithful. Some of the translations owe their success to the fact that the poets themselves have been involved in the translation of their poems. Udayan Thakker's poem "The Cobbler" is just one example of the same:

Look at the cobbler
Sitting in the busy street
Like a bus-stop, long cancelled;
Lines of smile torn from his face,
Like a strap of an old sandal.
He is laid in the corner
Like some monument to a martyr.

The self-conscious use of language and a sort of self-reflexivity in the poems of all four languages represented here define a postmodern sensitivity that brings Indian poetry out into the streets. "Languages do not live in houses," says Satchidanandan.

He ends his poem called "Languages" with his language rising from the street: "His feet dirty with the slime/from the gutter," eventually to climb up "the steps of the parliament house." Namdeo Dhasal's Marathi poems "A Notebook of Poems" and "Autobiography," Sitanshu Yashaschandra's Gujarati poem "Language" and Raghuvir Sahay's Hindi poem called "Hindi," appearing at various points in this collection, create an overall ambience suggestive of a shared poetic sensibility. The interrogating poet of one region shares his/her questions with the poets of the other regions of India. Which language? Why this or that language? Why write poetry? What is the self? These are questions that are important in the making of the history of any nation.

E.V. Ramakrishnan's "Introduction" to the book offers an illuminating and comprehensive critical context for the reader to get meaningful entry points to the range of experiences underlying the poems in this volume. Whether it is the anger of Dalit poets or the "troubled conscience" of women poets, the editor does well in providing space to the marginalised and selecting poems that are not just politically correct but are aesthetically satisfying too.

Anuradha Poddar's Marathi poem

"Only Then the Cursed Draupadi in Me" turns inwards and declares:

If you could be pulled out from my heart

like Draupadi, hair undone
into the open assembly
and if each superfluous cloth that
covers your naked skin
could be clawed away by these
thorn-like hands

Only then will the cursed deprived
Draupadi
in me be pacified.

Draupadi has been seething for centuries. She has to be located from within and pacified. Humanity seeks and strives for the dignity of its being, not through "transcendental visions" but through the nitty-gritty of living existence. That seems to be the project of sensitive minds captured so carefully, so delicately and sometimes so fiercely in the voices of the poets in *The Tree of Tongues*.

The soft and pleasant colours of Gulammohammed Sheikh's painting on the cover of this Anthology are inviting to the eye. In fact, they serve as a beautiful disguise for the dark and harsh truths lying between the covers of this well-produced book.

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On the cover page of this handy monograph is a captivating photo. The intense and large blue eyes staring from a handsome face could belong to a film star, a Punjabi folk singer, or an impassioned Keatsian poet. And indeed Pash, the subject of the book, could be identified with aspects of each of these figurations. There is a poignancy about his young volatile life and about his abrupt and violent death – a surrender at the altar of idealism. He is the stuff that legends are made of. T.S. Gill's perceptive account of Pash's life and writings consolidate the fragments that local folklore has constructed around a mercurial individual. In a way, the critic holds the soaring angel down to terra firma making him accountable for his choices; in another way, Gill's affectionate and indulgent viewpoint allows the angel to arc higher than ever before as he enters the pantheon of apotheosised literary personages.

But first the essential biography. Born in 1950 in a modest home in the Doaba region, Pash came under the influence of Naxalites in the late 60s and his rousing poems in the collection *Loh Katha* announced him as a votary of armed struggle in the Punjab. In 1970 he was arrested under suspicion of murder and committed to jail for a year. Though released from prison, he lived as a marked man, frequently being

Book review

Ideology of a Poet

PASH

Tejwant Singh Gill

Sahitya Akademi Series,
"Makers of Indian Literature."

Sahitya Akademi, 1999. Rs. 25. Pages 108.

apprehended on charges of violence. A passionate supporter of intellectual freedom and human dignity, Pash became a pawn in the complex web of political insurrections in the "Bluestar" years of Punjab. When information came that the Sikh terrorists had named Pash on their hit list, the young poet tried to escape the dragnet by emigrating to the U.S.A. But his revolutionary voice would not be silenced and he wrote about the anti-national activities of America-based Sikh terrorists. In turn, he was branded as a prime target and gunned down in his native village while on a visit to India. This was 1988, four years after Operation Bluestar. The sceptre of hate had not been laid to rest. Pash was thirty-eight years old. His destiny had been in curious emulation of his childhood hero – Bhagat Singh.

Tejwant Singh Gill's book on Pash explains the man and his work within the ideological contestations of the quest for national identity in Punjab. The turbulent decades from the 60s to the late 80s parallel the life of Pash. From the story of one man, significant to his devoted followers, the reader catches glimpses of the personal and the political, the regional and the national, poetics and propaganda. "Pash" was a pen name magically coined by a young Avtar Singh Sandhu. Lilted and resonant, he remains identified with its amorphous possibilities.

In a finely written chapter, "Ideology and structure of feeling," Gill traces the influence of the Naxalite movement on the impressionable minds of youthful rebels in Bengal and in Northern India. The rhetoric of

change, especially as articulated by Charu Mazumder, found its support in the call for revolution by Marxist sympathisers in the Punjab. Pash the creative artist, and Pash the self-styled revolutionary, meet in a queer conjunction in the Diary that visually represents the map of India. "Capitalists and landlords who are few in number have bled my loved country to nothing. So it will remain till these butchers are not deprived of this outrageous right" (p 18), says Pash even as he pictorially leaves blots in the text of the country to signify the bloodshed! One can chuckle indulgently at such adolescent fervour to remember that Pash was young, very young, and such excesses are best overlooked. However, maturity was to come soon as he turned as an acolyte to Trotsky's revolutionary passion and declared that Punjab should rectify the deplorable condition of its proletariat. That "ideology and feeling" is a complex negotiation is analysed by Gill with an acute eye: "Pash did not reckon with certain flaws in the deep structure of Trotsky's thinking.... Sound in the abstract, his theory of permanent revolution could not garner actual support from the people" (p 22).

Pash is written with a lucidity and thoroughness which makes the Punjabi author easily accessible. Gill expertly guides us through eight

collections of Pash's writing, explaining, contextualising, annotating, as the requirement may be. Considering the fact that Pash wrote in many modes—and moods—this is a challenging task. *Loh Katha* was the first collection of Pash's poems, published when he was merely twenty years old, settling down in his village after his discharge from the Border Security Force. The opening gambit is a poem titled "Bharat" which at once alerts the reader to the son-of-the-soil argument about patriotism. Debunking the pretences of elite cultural practice, the young idealist claims that only the weather worn labourer or the careworn tiller understands the essential concept of nationhood. The theme of exploitation of the working class by a privileged capitalist segment places the poems within a sort of Marxist mode – the qualifying "sort of" is meant to point to Pash's rather naive understanding of class struggle. What can one really endorse is the limited artistry and limited viewpoint in words such as these:

But with full regard to you
To the existentialism you flaunt
We shall hurl you to the moon...
(p. 30)

Pash's youthful vigour is better expressed in the love poetry contained in *Udhe Baajan Magar* where he successfully "subverts," in Gill's opinion, "motifs popular with love poets in Punjabi" (p. 49). Surely, the lively images of "laughter as of linseed

flower" (p. 48), or "errors from the page of life" speak well for poetic sensibility. The anger of youthful, raw political thinking serves well to demolish the prevailing sentimentality about rural life or for that matter, soft romanticism. The project of unearthing brutality beneath the veneer of cultivated "love" remains evident as in *Chithian*. Far from glorifying village life in its supposed simplicity and nostalgia, Pash evidently warns against the vulgarising of folklore in the "pseudo-songs" created for "the money they amass through their circulation" (p. 24).

Pash, the rebel, and that is what remains most attractive about the Punjabi poet, is a firm opponent of all oppressive forms, be they in literature, politics or in social constructions. Boldly, he exposes the falsity of mass religion (p. 25) and turns a critical eye upon growing communalism (p. 26). Gill astutely points towards Pash's tentative, groping vocabulary for secularism, which to Pash, and to several others of his post-independence generation, was linked to a "respect for all religions with the implicit belief that they conveyed the same ethical and spiritual message" (p. 25).

Gill's own study of Marxist thinkers actively plays upon his analysis of Pash's nascent political ideology for a groundswell of "polity, belief and joy," words from Pash's last collection published in his lifetime, *Saade Samia Vich*. Personally, this is the collection I

find most appealing. The ardour for change seems tinged with a wisdom that takes note of the indeterminable edges of human experience. Pash also gathers within his ambit of exhortations those social constituencies which are often ignored by mainstream politics. A poem such as the following gives evidence of the scope of Pash's maturity in terms of content as well as linguistic range:

Comrade, how counter to
revolution and class
Has our sister grown
She hides her pebbles
Underneath my erudite books,
For all the wisdom drilled into her
head
She is worried more about play
Than society's future. (p. 74)

While I remark upon Pash's linguistic capabilities, I am acutely conscious that I am dealing with a translated text and that the language quoted is that of the translator, T.S. Gill. This is an occasion to ask a pertinent question about the target audience for such renderings as also to wonder about claims of "authenticity." The translated text is usually written for a reader who does not know the original language. A relationship of trust is created between the translator and the reader as also between the translator and the author. In this case of reading Pash, I am inclined to depend upon the "authentic" rendition from Punjabi to English offered by a scholar of repute. While it is possible that another rendering may be couched differently,

one must grant that the original will not be ignored or falsified by any aware translator in today's literary scenario. To return then to my "sense" of the original poems, I would say that Gill has preserved the flavour of Pash's revolutionary phrases, as also the verse form, in the few poems appended to the end of this literary biography.

In conclusion, Tejwant Singh Gill's book on Pash is a thoughtful, well structured, extended essay. It offers academic critique as it points to the influence of Pablo Neruda on the choice of tone and subject in Pash's political writing (p. 56) while it also traces the growth of a callow young man from naivety to an intelligent comprehension of power relations in the modern nation state. Gill is objective enough to see the discontinuous identifications which often caused conflict in the emergent artist. Occasionally Gill adopts the tone of an indulgent mentor to the rebel poet but an immediate corrective is offered by Gill the honed critic. There's a fine balance to be maintained in a work such as this. Eulogy sounds false, irony is redundant. T.S. Gill shows the way by weaving a fine commentary on the life and works of Pash. He displays his own engagement with the problematics of Marxism even while he allows primacy of voice to the young poet who is his subject.

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Tejwant Singh Gill's translation of some selected poems by Pash, one of the leading revolutionary poets of Punjab, is a welcome addition to the still small world of translated works in Punjabi literature. Pash, who along with Surjit Pattar inherited the poet's mantle from Shiv Butalvi, has left his mark on Punjabi Poetry, despite an early death.

The literary artefact carries within it an amazing contradiction. On the one hand, literature can easily be transferred to other cultures for it deals with human situations, aspirations, frustrations, losses, experiences and emotions. One does not have to acquire a taste for it, as one has to do for the music or dance of another culture. Yet, on the other hand, codified as it is within one linguistic code, it is difficult to cross the linguistic boundaries unless it is translated. Hence, when the linguistic boundaries are crossed, it is a matter of joy for it allows accessibility to the otherwise inaccessible, and opens up a whole new world.

Pash, whose real name was Avtar Singh Sandhu, was born in 1950 and grew up in rural Punjab experiencing the great divide between the rich and the poor, and being on the wrong side

Book review

A Challenge to the Translator's Imagination

RECKONING WITH DARK TIMES:
SEVENTY FIVE POEMS BY PASH

translated from the original Punjabi

by Tejwant Singh Gill

New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1999. pp. 126. Rs 80.

of power, which by its very nature is ruthless and pushes the oppressed towards agitation and violence. He was sympathetic to the naxalites and his poetry is deeply influenced by the revolutionary ideology. There is anger, rage, rebelliousness, and a determined will to resist, oppose and question the status of power. There is an interlacing of violence, the violence which was to overtake him when he was gunned to death in 1988 at the age of thirty-eight. Pash died without having acquired the patience of age or the mellowness of defeat; but he did acquire a genuine poetic voice (as he shifted from one job

to another, from the border Security Force to a journalistic career), and a literary expression. He started writing in 1970 and his poetic career spans the period of the naxalite hold over Punjab. He witnessed the militancy and the turmoil which shattered Punjab during the 70s and 80s.

The poems in the present volume have been selected from four collections of his poems: *Loh Katha* (1970), *Ud de Baajan Magar* (1974), *Saade Samaan Vich* (1978) and the posthumous *Khilre Hoi Virke* (1980) (the last symbolically referring to his uncollected poems as *The Scattered*

Leaves). They are representative of his poetic voice as well as the experimentation he was engaged in.

Translation is always a challenge to the translator's imagination, as he empathises with two linguistic codes and attempts to simulate the original experience in a different language. Poetry offers even a greater challenge than prose as it seeks to reproduce the nuances, rhythms, images and tightly woven metaphors as closely as possible and Gill seems to have captured them and reproduced the stylistic devices with a surprising degree of fidelity: the interrogative sentences, the colloquialisms of a spoken idiom, the romanticism which has turned sour. There is a beautiful short poem, almost prophetic in the manner it announces death:

In the dark, pitch dark nights
when moments shudder from each
other to recoil,
and the light in the room upstairs
jumps down to death from the
windows above;
in the womb of such serene nights;
when revolt rages wild,
My murder can occur in light or
twilight.

Pash's poetry is not limited to the experiences or images of rural Punjab. He casts his net far and wide and moves from one part of the country to other places; he traverses the records of history and calls upon the dead to witness the present; he searches the skies in this need for a saviour and moves across religions. There is a deep sense of history – both political and cultural, as well as the history of ideas. Contemporary personalities walk in and out of his poems, indicating a sharp awareness of the world of conflict and of the territories of power. He flits from the village barber to Jimmy Carter, to the various wars of civilisation, the power struggles, the Mahabharata and the lives of the Gurus. The goat grazer inhabits his poetry alongside Gandhi. There is a very fine poem "Against the Defiled Language." Others which deserve special mention are "A Grass-like Person's Tale," "Application for Disinheritance," "In Our Times" and "Tragedy of a censored letter." The

freshness of images, the complexity of emotion, the warring ideas locked up in the human mind, the divisiveness, the harsh self-critiquing almost like tearing the psyche into bits – every poem has something new to convey, every poem establishes a connection with the reader in some conscious or unconscious response, disrupting complacency and acceptance.

But it would be a mistake to think that ideas overpower the poet to such an extent that the poetic art is neglected. No, that is not the case. The brevity and starkness of poems like "Jail" and "When Revolt Rages Wild" is replaced by startling images in a longer poem, like "Talking to a comrade." This poem is in six parts and each part addresses itself to an assessment of different realities – the political stances, the state of things, the failures and failed revolutions of history, a questioning of the communist credo, the futility of class hatred, the unreliability of being and the price of survival. Image after image

goes on building up an atmosphere of anger and defeat, of pain and rootedness juxtaposing the generality of ideas with the particularity of the individual human condition, the controlling power structures with human waywardness, and the ideological positions with emotional responses. An example of a striking image which is built on reversal and contrast is:

Salute to you O cold kettle
And to times boiling in you!
Salute to you O crawling bird
And the sky petrified in you!

From a poem of this kind when one shifts to another poem like "A Letter" it is almost as if the village letter writer has taken charge: "Our mood is fine, of your own do write," which calls to one's mind "Yahan sab kushal hai, apna hal likhen." And with such a beginning, every succeeding stanza opens out a world of annihilation, destruction, cruelty, death – the ships that have sunk, God who is dead, war

which kills, marauders who loot, and thus all things perish.

For Gill, apparently, it has been a labour of love and he has displayed a fine instinct for transferring the poetic impulse, carefully choosing the words. If the poems can hold the reader's interest and evoke a response then the task is well performed. But the critical response to such a work of translation is forked; it tends to focus excessively on ideological issues and less on poetic experimentation; approximate fidelity to the original becomes a point of consideration and one ends up by evaluating the translation rather than the work, imposing upon the translator a whole lot of responsibility which Gill has fulfilled admirably. Gill's selection of poems is also judicious as Pash's early poems gradually move into the later phase. *Reckoning with Dark Times* is a valuable addition to the field of comparative studies.

Jasbir Jain, Director, IRIS,
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This book is the first *Katha* publication devoted to one single writer that approaches a litterateur – Ismat, a legend in Urdu literature. *Katha* is a 'nonprofit society' aiming at 'enhancing the pleasures of reading,' which in fact are declining very fast. Earlier this society was known to writers and readers of literature through *Katha Prize Story* volumes edited by Ms Geeta Dharamrajan, a real force behind the society's literary activities.

At the outset, *Katha* must be congratulated for the profusely illustrated and richly contributed book on the life and times of Ismat Chughtai, who has now become an inseparable constituent of the Indian literary heritage. The editors of this book have been careful, cautious and meticulous in selecting articles, photographs and other related material, classifying the same under the sub-headings – 'Ismat on Ismat,' 'Chronology,' 'By Ismat,' 'Critics and Writers on Ismat,' 'Ismat and Her Films,' 'Reminiscences and An Interview,' 'Supplementary Reading,' and 'Genealogy and Tidbits.' The articles from various critics and contemporary writers like Manto, Krishan Chander, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Qurratulain Hyder and others give a deep insight into her life, times and writings. It is not enough to know that a writer is a progressive or a reactionary; what matters is to know the writer's concerns and how he or she communicated the same to readers through his or her writings! Under the subheading 'Ismat on Ismat,' in her article 'Caravan Dust,' Ismat writes, "As a child, I saw minions in such a pitiable state that I began hating both the master and the institution of servants (not servants themselves).

Book review

The Legend of Ismat Chughtai

ISMAT: HER LIFE, HER TIMES

Edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar & Sadique

Katha Publications, New Delhi, pp. ?

Rs. 395, US\$ 18.99, £ 11.99.

Many of my stories have characters that are servants, some weak and helpless, some liars, cheats and connivers ... when I came into contact with the world at large, I learnt that discrimination on the basis of class and caste was merely a farce." She further observes, "There was no room for love and affection in our upbringing. And it was only what we learnt from our servants that came to our rescue" (p 21). This observation of Ismat is full of pathos which underlines the love and devotions of minions towards the children of the family in contrast to her own family members. This experience is not limited to Ismat and other children in the family alone, but it is and has been the experience of all of them who are or were brought up in the feudal background. According to Ismat, whatever such children learnt, good or bad, they learnt from the class which had been subservient to their masters. She revolted against this tradition in life as well as through her writings.

'In conversation,' Gopichand Narang, one of the leading critics in Urdu Literature, while talking to Sukrita, one of the editors of the book, admits "Ismat had a very aggressive personality and I think our literary criticism has been fighting shy of

Ismat. Ismat's writings certainly need to be reread closely. I'd say she's a forerunner of feminist writing" (p 243). If I may be permitted to say, she was not merely the forerunner of feminist writing, but was also a great visionary of women's emancipation.

I again quote from 'Carvan Dust': "to me this femininity seemed just a hoax. To my mind, this display of contentedness, cowardice and hypocrisy was deceitful. To me even makeup, dressing up and wearing gaudy clothes seemed to be the means of covering up faults and engaging in deception" (p 26). Her total attitude towards conventionality in regard to women as a whole was of defiance, which helped her to crystallise her understanding as a person and a writer about emancipation of women. She hated sickening traditions like Purdah, early marriage, education, segregation of sex etc. An interesting episode from her autobiography is worth referring to here:

"Amma had smacked me..."

"You wicked, accursed creature!" blows started raining on me from all sides – You stuffed the burqa in the bag deliberately, didn't you? I accepted the blows as if they were sweets. I knew very well that it was just not

possible to open the well-trussed bedding in half an hour. I was made to wrap a chadar around me and I stepped on the platform like a bold victor" (p 70).

Is this not a testimony of her militant attitudes, towards such sickening traditions prevalent in the family, and the society as a whole, preventing women to live as a normal human being?

Sukrita in 'Introducing Ismat' is quite elaborate, critical and objective in her observations. I feel inclined to agree with her that "the recognition of the ethnic geography emerging from Ismat's large body of writings is disturbing, not because of its rather explicit realism but because it brings with itself a poignant awareness of the grip of oppressive patriarchy over the Muslim middle class" (p 15).

In her article 'Progressive Literature and I,' Ismat professes in unambiguous terms and with a great foresight that "perhaps, after this modernist literature, an ultra modernist literature will come into being and perhaps at that time, the ultra modern writer would leap out of his own bounds and discover himself in majority. And then it will pierce through this suffocation and darkness to point towards that cleft which opens into light, friendship and self confidence" (p 133).

She further claims "that all literature is propaganda, the Quran, the Bible, the Tauriyat, The Vedas. The poetry of Meera, Ghalib, Zauk, and Shibli and Hesrat Mohani is propaganda. The message of Mahatma and the Buddha is propaganda. The verses of Tulsidas, Kabir and Khushro are propaganda. Every conceivable literature is the propaganda of some ideology or the other" (p 133).

Justice has been, by far, the most important theme of consideration in political theory after John Rawls' masterpiece *A Theory of Justice* (1973). Rawls' work threw up two major strands of critical responses from within the liberal fold: The first criticised him for proposing a patterned and non-historical conception of Justice with deleterious consequences for freedom. The other response, known as communitarian, termed the Rawlsian conception of Justice as unencumbered and argued that our understanding and evaluations are embedded in communities and cultures. Against the privileging of right and unattached self by Rawls, communitarians valorised the good and ends embodied in cultures and identities. Rawls acknowledged the significance of this critique in his subsequent work and advanced a conception of a just political order in *Political Liberalism* (1993) taking the good and ends seriously.

Justice is a central theme in Marxism, not merely because Marxists upbraided capitalism for the prevalence of injustices of all kinds, but because Marx himself suggested that the communist society will regulate itself on a different and superior principle of justice, that is, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

However, apart from this rhetoric and value-posturing there has been little systematic reflection on the value of justice in Marxism till recently. Even when this theme was taken up for consideration, the status of Marxism as science clouded any serious engagement with it. Three developments, however, brought the issue of justice to the centre-stage of Marxist scholarship: the debate on the relation between facts and values or science and morals; the rise of analytical philosophy and rational choice theories, and the attempt by liberals to redraft liberalism with a conception of justice as their anchor. Rawls set the ball rolling for Marxists too.

The present work is an addition, a distinctive addition, to the large corpus of literature that the Marxist endeavour has spawned in the last thirty years. Undoubtedly, it displays a close familiarity with the complex developments in Marxist theory during this period and a felicity to

Book review

Justice and Marxism

JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY:
AN ESSAY IN MARXIST POLITICAL THEORY

Vidhu Verma

New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London, Sage,
1999; pp.216; Paperback; Price Rs. 195

formulate and reflectively consider complex arguments. A single theme, the conception of justice in Marx, is consistently pursued throughout the work negotiating across allied and adversarial positions, and marking its determinations all along.

This work clearly locates itself in the conceptual framework of analytical Marxism. It interrogates the existing scholarship in this trend on their understanding of justice in Marx, criticises the liberal version of justice from the Marxist perspective, proposes a distinct Marxist theory of justice linked to exploitation, reaches out to forms of injustices in capitalist society other than those based on class exploitation and attempts to relate these injustices to this theory. Further it contends against the *Distributive Justice Approach* (DJA) and the *Beyond Justice Approach* (BJA), the prevailing theories of justice in Marxism, and defends a non-judicial conception of justice (NJA) in Marx.

We can look at the work a little closely to grasp the main line of the argument that runs across the work. It critiques what it calls as the juridical model of justice expressed in liberal formulations where a legal order upholds an abstract realm of equal rights that are, however, at odds with prevailing social relations based on exploitation and oppression. Marx, on the contrary, is seen privileging the latter over the former. Although liberals have a limited, distorted and egoistic conception of rights, Marx does not reject the appropriateness of the category of rights as such for socialism. The author claims that Marx advances a *non-judicial conception of justice* (NJA) which she contrasts with the *Distributive Justice Approach* (DJA) that emphasises the distribution of wealth, income and other material

resources, and *Beyond Justice Approach* (BJA) which argues that communism transcends justice. Her endeavour is to arrive at Marx's conception of justice which upholds an inter-linked realm of freedom and equality in a non-judicial and non-exploitative order that upholds a conception of the good society where distribution of goods is linked to the self-realisation of its members in community with others.

She interrogates two positions on justice in contemporary Marxist scholarship, the Justice Thesis and the Injustice Thesis. The Justice Thesis saw capitalism as just, judged by its own standards as there are none outside it. The Injustice Thesis argues that Marx condemned capitalism as unjust and he did it on socialist principles of justice based on a theory of morals. It criticises the Justice Thesis for ignoring the evaluatory dimension in Marx and concentrating only on the explanatory. The author has her sympathies with the Injustice Thesis but she does not want to confine Marx's theory of justice to its moral critique. She thinks that this position is not adequately sensitive to Marx's scientific endeavour; to other values such as rights, equality and morality; in relating the materialist conception to the trans-historical factors; to forms of injustice other than those based on class exploitation; and she finds that, to overhaul social relations, it basically concentrates on distribution rather than production.

The author formulates the non-judicial (NJA) conception of justice as characteristic of Marx, after locating the inadequacies of a Marxist conception of justice within the existing scholarship. For the purpose, she critiques the liberal theory of justice which she finds bogged down in legal formalism and abstract rules. She

highlights Marx's criticism of its conceptions of the human person, community, rights, rule of law, freedom, equality and associated institutions and its inability to highlight how the concentration of the means of production, class relations and power affect these conceptions. Against it, Marx proposed a theory of justice that revolved around the centrality of exploitation in capitalist society. He believed that rights can be enjoyed only in a community with others, and equality and freedom need to be related to a theory of distribution tied to the idea of good society that emphasises on self-realisation of its members. Marx did not reject liberal categories but reformulated them as an integral part of his endeavour.

The third chapter explores the concept of exploitation that, according to the author, constituted for Marx the core of class-injustice in capitalist society. The author discusses the three theories of exploitation: the simple theory of exploitation (STE) with its two versions based on labour theory of value (LTV) and labour-theft, the utility theory of exploitation which suggests that the entire vortex of relations in capitalist society come to be shaped by its dominant relations and Roemer's conception of exploitation that stresses on the initial unjust distribution of resources and assets. She is in favour of STE with a critical sympathy towards self-ownership (SOT) in response to the explanation of labour-theft. Finally she links up this class-based theory of justice with social movements and distinguishes their respective claims through the concepts of exploitation and oppression respectively. She rejects the applicability of STE to issues raised by peasants, women, tribals, low castes, environmentalists and oppressed nationalities. Unlike exploitation, "oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because of a particular class but because of it being structural" (p 135). Unlike in class relations, the oppressed group does not, she feels, need to have a correlate oppressing group.

In the final chapter the author argues that Marx suggested a good society in which the distribution of goods is based on the need for the self-realisation of its members. She refutes

Is this statement not worth pondering? If all literature is propaganda of some ideology or the other, then what about the life experience portrayed by various writers, old and contemporary, in their writings? Is that propaganda? Values of life may be propagated but not life itself. It has to be lived, loved intensely and earnestly.

To conclude, may I say that to go

through this 'Katha Book' under review is an experience in itself. Sukrita has stated in the introduction of the book - "Ismat Chughtai became a legend while she was alive..." For an ordinary person like me, is it not difficult to comment on a book written and compiled about a legend? No doubt *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* is one of the few books that has been devoted

to an individual woman writer, that too in such a meticulous and planned manner. Hopefully, *Katha* will bring out more such books to fulfil their promise to enhance the pleasure of reading. In the end, I wish to say, hesitatingly, an ordinary reader gets lots of information about Ismat's life and her times, but what about her writings, which made her a legend in

her own right? If some of her representative stories were to form a part of the book under review, the pleasure of reading would have become more intense and real.

The editors, Sukrita and Sadique, along with the *Katha* management, deserve all appreciation for bringing out this book.

Giriraj Kishore
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DJA and BJA vis-à-vis NJA and upholds the superiority of the socialist ideal of justice.

DJA has several problems. It assumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. It emphasises on consumption and the principles of contribution and need are deployed for the purpose. However, DJA is not sensitive to the limitations of the principles of merit and need. NJA, on the contrary, redrafts distribution principles to include the idea of equal conditions of freedom and distribution of goods according to need (p 150). It stresses on productive activity pursued for its own sake, community and relative abundance.

BJA claims that the society that overcomes the problems of scarcity and conflict is not in need of justice. Therefore communism is a form of society that transcends justice.

However, NJA argues that this is not the case. Although communism will put an end to class-based conflicts, other conflicts will remain. The distributive issue expressed in contribution/need, the ideal of self-realisation, maintenance of just distribution etc., call for the continued salience of a conception of justice. Although Marx did not spell them out, some sort of judicial and non-judicial institutions are necessary too in a communist society which could uphold such an order. In this context the author contrasts the notion of community upheld by Marx against the communitarians.

This is undoubtedly a major attempt to formulate a theory of justice by taking the issue of class-based exploitation under capitalism seriously in the context of the new issues in the horizon where old certainties can no longer call the shots.

The study has involved wading through a complex body of social and political theories in relation to which Marx's conception of justice has been formulated and defended. Further, the work has involved a rational scrutiny of Marx's position, sorting out the defensible from the indefensible and, sometimes, taking up very bold stand against the tide.

The study also avoids the 'catch all' approach whereby Marxists advanced an uni-causal explanation for everything under the sun. The author does not hesitate to suggest that Marx's theory of justice, as she has formulated, holds good only to situations of capitalist class-based exploitation and not to all situations of injustices. For instance, she feels that Marx's theory of justice cannot respond to the issues raised by the new social movements and gender injustice.

This work also presents many problems some of which are just indicated here: The concern with the discrete and the palpable, a legacy of analytical Marxism, makes the author to not engage with larger issues and relations. The relation between classes and the state which would have helped to relate issues of justice and exploitation is simply side-tracked. The state figures in only when the narrow boundaries of distribution have to be transcended. This sidelining of the state also leads the author into major traps such as the inability to relate exploitation of the workers with other oppressed sections and overtly emphasise on production, without seeing production, circulation, exchange and distribution as different moments of capital. While the study is full of references to Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, it is not

surprising that it does not refer at all to the worker-peasant alliance which Marx suggested there. Further, she does not think that the non-proletarian bloc of the oppressed needs to be disaggregated. There are some forms of oppressions, to use her term, that are closely interwound with class exploitation, particularly given the expanding horizons of capital, while the other forms are not so.

The above failure to grapple with complex relations and mediations, and perceive their linkages with the political is called *economism*, in the good old language of Marxists. One of the crudest manifestation of *economism* is an attempt to explain social processes by confining oneself to the factory floor of production. The author makes a promising beginning against such a tendency when she attacks the Justice Thesis and highlights the salient features of the Injustice Thesis. However, there is no evidence to show that the ensemble of a social formation as a whole with their autonomous trajectories and reinforced insinuations holds aloft the author's imagination. In a lighter vein, can one say that the pursuit of the non-judicial has led to the erasure of the superstructures?

There are several issues on which the work does not offer adequate clarity. Why not attempt to construct a theory of justice linking it to alienation as suggested by Lukes? The relation between values and norms on one hand and science on the other is not clarified adequately although it is important to the sustainability of the work as a whole. There seems to be a lot of arbitrariness and ad-hocism about what are the defensible interpretations of Marx and what are not, and which passages of Marx have

to be shelved and which should not? If that is all there is to it, why invoke Marx at all?

The study has a big problem about handling human agency and rights, the great issue that Rawls attempts to come to terms with in *Political Liberalism*. Marxism highlights a conception of the good, however hedged in it might be, by taking into account a myriad of other considerations. What warrantee is there that self-realisation, a central feature of the theory she unfolds, should necessarily be in congruence with such a good, particularly in the longer run?

Converting large issues and great theories into scarecrows may not payoff. Can Rawls be said to be upholding juridical approach to justice or even Dworkin for that matter, although the latter works much more within the framework of jurisprudence? Does mainstream communitarianism subscribe to 'gender-coded, race-coded and class-coded' communities? To what extent is an unqualified statement, such as "Marx does not view loyalties, or communal attachments, which identify individuals as members of a class, sect or community as surviving in any form under communism" (p 182), tenable? Analytical Marxism may like to shed its attachments to lineages of thought. However, can Marxists afford to say that let Hegel and Aristotle be with communitarians and Kant with Rawls and Marx alone suffices for us? Conversely, can one seriously engage with Marxist theory of justice without bringing to the fore issues that Rawls and the communitarians raise?

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Participation is today an oft-repeated terminology in development circles. It has come to represent anything and everything from empowerment of disenfranchised people to a cliché necessary for development funding. The number of books in the market on this topic is amazing since its circulation among professional developers seems to far exceed its practice in spirit. Much of this proliferation is perhaps well intended. However, it is important to note the ideological assumptions that drive such essays on participation. For instance, there is no denying that communication is essential for any form of participation, but is it sufficient as the book under review claims? If only we could solve or ignore so easily the entrenched historical, political and economic power and politics that pervades societies!

Shirley White's edited collection on the art of facilitating participation begins attractively with a foreword by

Book review

Participatory Communication as Panacea

THE ART OF FACILITATING PARTICIPATION:
RELEASING THE POWER OF GRASSROOTS COMMUNICATION.

Editor Shirley White, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
1999. 367p. Rs. 445 (cloth), Rs. 250 (paper)

one of the pioneers of participatory research, Robert Chambers. He points out four aspects of good facilitation: 1) being sensitive to who participates, 2) willingness of the facilitator to unlearn, 3) giving up control or letting go, and 4) personal commitment, appropriate attitudes and behaviours. While these terms or notions are found in all the essays in this book, the practical utility of these essays ranges from dismal to excellent. The notion of 'community'

is often used uncritically in many essays of this book, and the 'deep divisions' noted by Chambers in the foreword are ignored for the most part. Where they are recognised, the good intentions of the facilitator and good communication tools seem sufficient to overcome these divisions. Essays in the book that are based directly on a particular field experience, where the authors share the mistakes they have made and the lessons learnt from

failures, are brilliant. But the majority of the theoretical essays abound in rhetorical clichés and problematic assumptions. I will first point out some examples of the latter and then focus on the few chapters that are most useful.

The assumption linking many of the articles in the book is that "communication is the foundation of participation" (p 18). This collection of nineteen essays explores the art of facilitation from three points of departure: activation (six chapters), technique (eight chapters) and community building (three chapters). These are also seen as a series of phases in the process of participation, where people are activated in the first phase, various techniques or approaches are employed to enable participation in the second phase, and the third phase is that of community-building.

Shirley White and K. Sadanandan Nair put forth the idea of a catalyst

communicator. They provide ideas for facilitation without fear, although it is still unclear who fears what or whom given the state of current development hierarchies. In the last chapter, White provides an explanation for this noting that people retreat to an authority position and dictate terms because of feelings of fear or inadequacy. She conveniently ignores the advantages and benefits of power and control. White and Nair also claim that participatory development communication reduces the dominance of power holders. Applying this to rural India, it is unclear how the dominance of the upper caste/class urban English-educated professional whose monthly/weekly consultant fees is often more than ten times the annual income of a landless labourer is reduced through communication. Or for that matter, how the power of politically powerful zamindars or bureaucrats acclaimed for their corruption is reduced through such communication.

Similar problematic assumptions are evident in the chapter by Anyagbunam et al. discussing Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) experiences. "In the context of development work, this view assumes that communicating partners are equal" (p 209). After participation in a PRCA, people are empowered and capable of identifying and analysing their own problems, needs, and capabilities (p 212). PRCA methods would thus be useful where people's development is hindered by their inability to identify and analyse their own problems, or where the basic problem of development is methodological.

Simone St Anne stresses the importance of creativity to the facilitator. The chapter reads like a new age self-help piece and asks us to play, to meditate, to awaken the creative self and release the creative spirit (pp. 75-76). There is also a mention of the chemistry of mind and body, but the role of creative and sexual energy that the author describes is incongruous when applied to the context of a village development group meeting in rural India.

While many pages are devoted to emphasising the wisdom of local people, the need to listen to them (the poor) and to change ourselves (the developers), the ultimate goal of development is still to transform the thinking of the poor. The idea that the poor themselves (their illiteracy and ignorance, their inability to understand their own situation, their inability to communicate their problems to us, and their unwillingness to work together) are responsible for their wretched existence continues to plague

development thinking, although these ideas have been critiqued for over three decades now. Some examples from this book: The role of the catalyst communicator is to transform the way they (poor) look at themselves, the way they view their community, etc. (p 40); Do they know what they will have to do to get what they want...? (p 339); Are they willing to modify their lifestyle to reach out to others?; Do they have the desire to build trusting relationships? (p 340). This is in contrast to Jim Lees and Sonali Ojha's advice in the same book to challenge our own assumptions, to respect and listen to local people and their wisdom.

A few other chapters in the book are somewhat relevant to practitioners. For instance, chapter eight is an interview with Orlando Fals Borda on Participatory Action Research (PAR) by Ricardo Gomez. Borda reveals his perceptiveness by recognising both the use and misuse of the notion of participation and PAR. He also advises that there is no universal formulae to PAR: "Decisions have to be based on the particular circumstances in which work is being done, on the nature of the pressures that are perceived locally, and on the degree of support of the local people" (p 155). Josh Galper's piece on the participatory use of economic indicators is interesting, although its actual implementation presumes that communication is a primary cause of maldevelopment. Linking this with the wider debate on the politics of economic indicators (for instance the debates about cost-benefit analysis in the Narmada movement or the GDP alternatives devised by the UN) will provide a useful context. Don Richardson's chapter based on field experience in accessing internet services for development is appropriate for those working with poorer communities in more developed societies where basic education and electricity are available. In such a specific context, the article is useful since it provides specific advice. Marilyn Hoskins' description of her experiences with the Forestry for Local Community Development and the Forest, Trees and People Programs provide useful pointers for encouraging participation of various national and regional organisations in large scale projects.

Finally, three pieces stand out in this book for their clarity, usefulness, and down-to-earth candidness. Koniz-Booher's "confessions of an outside facilitator" is remarkable for the author's analysis of failures and perceptive insights into the world of consultant driven development. The author points out how theoretical training at the most famous institutes did not quite prepare her for the reality

of working in a different culture, under different sets of cultural and professional norms (p 95). The author also shows a rare sensitivity to historical, economic, and political power relations between donor countries, donor organisations, consultants, local governments, non-government organisations and local people. The role of humility, consensus and coordination between organisations, especially donors and implementers, for the success of development, which is rarely ever discussed in print, is lucidly brought out in this essay. This chapter stands out for its sensitive portrayal of the realities of working in the development sector and has practical pointers for success on the ground. The advantages and disadvantages that an outside facilitator brings with her/him described by Koniz-Booher is a must read for those entering this sector.

The chapter by Jim Lees and Sonali Ojha is again outstanding for the sensitivity, care and humility displayed by the authors in the field. The same issues of respecting people we work with and the need to listen to them are brought to life through their description of their work with street children. It is important to note the rare courage the authors show in questioning and re-examining the assumptions of their employers. Continuously challenging their own assumptions, recognising and respecting the vulnerability and wisdom of the children they work with, and refraining from falling into the moralising advisor mode are important practices that are to be learnt.

The third piece that stands out in the collection is also directly based on a field study in Nepal. Meredith Fowle's insights on linking the scientist and farmer provide valuable lessons to scientists and experts, especially in third-world conditions. The author underlines the established scientific knowledge-power hierarchies that exist, and the inferiority-complex prevalent in many third-world societies about their own capabilities. Also avoiding the trap of romanticising indigenous knowledge, the author suggests a mutual partnership in linking the scientist and the farmer.

This book thus provides examples of both critical understanding of development experiences as well as rhetorical clichés on the elusive 'power' of grassroots communication. A few essays from this book are on my essential reading list, but most of the other chapters are better left on the shelf.

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Peasantry and the State: Early Nineteenth Century Punjab, by Radha Sharma, K.K. Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, Rs. 350. Distributed by Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 4753/23, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi.

A History of Socialist Thought: From the Precursors to the Present, by Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy, Sage Publications India, M-32 Market, Greater Kailash-1, New Delhi-110048.

History of Parliament in India, Vol. VI, by Subhash C. Kashyap, Shipra Publications, Vikas Marg, New Delhi, Rs. 850.

The Khalsa, by Pirthipal Singh Kapur and Dharam Singh, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, Rs. 180.

Symbols and Graphic Representations in India, by H.S. Sarkar and B.M. Pande, Aryan Books International, Pooja Apartments, 4B, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002, Rs. 750.

Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therigatha, by Kathryn R. Balckstone, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi-110007, Rs. 195.

Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon, by N.N. Bhattacharyya, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 4753/23, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi-110002, Rs. 400.

The Gender Gap in Basic Education: NGOs as Change Agents, edited by Rekha Wazir, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Rs. 225.

A Dictionary of Moral Concepts in Gandhi, by R.K. Gupta, Madhyam Book Service, Distributed by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi-110055, Rs. 180.

Punishment and the Prison: India and International Perspectives, edited by Rani Dhavan Shankardass, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Rs. 550.

India's Energy: Essays on Sustainable Development, edited by Pierre Audinet, P.R. Shukla, Frederic Grare, Manohar Publishers and Distributors and Centre de Science Humaines, New Delhi, Rs. 600.

Metropolitan City Governance in India, by Marina R. Pinto, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Rs. 395.

Human Rights and the Refugee Problems, Laws and Practice, by Manik Chakraborty, Foreword by Mr. Justice P.Y. Sarkar, Deep and Deep Publications, 159, Sahwney Apartments, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi-110027, Rs. 500.

Painters at Sikh Court, by B.N. Goswamy, Aryan Books International, Pooja Apartments, 4B, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002, Rs.950.

Seven years before its present appearance in English, Michael Mann's study of agrarian and ecological change in the central Ganga-Yamuna Doab was first published in German, in 1992. Though by then ecological concerns had begun to find a foothold in the terrain of historical research in India, the overlap between social, economic and administrative processes still provided the most convincing explanation for historical phenomena. The increasing inclusion of ecology as an influential factor seemed to add awkward edges to an otherwise harmonious construction. Understandably then, as explanatory arguments, the widely appreciated socio-economic impact of administrative decisions needed only reiteration while ecological considerations required elaboration. The book under review highlights the marked ecological transformation that occurred in the Central Doab during the early decades of British rule and explains it to be the result of administrative and economic policies of the colonial government. Not surprisingly, the term 'Indian soil' in the title of the book conveys not simply its more commonly understood metaphoric meaning of Indian political territory, but also its very literal sense of the soil as an economically exploitable and alterable physical entity.

The book appears to consist of three broad logical divisions – though the chapterisation itself follows different lines. The first, and largest, portion of approximately 85 pages (Chapters 2 and 4) deals explicitly with the nature of 'British rule' and its impact on the agrarian economy. Chapter 2 discusses at length the evolution of British land revenue administration in the ceded and conquered provinces. It describes agrarian social hierarchies and local revenue responsibilities of village level functionaries in the Central Doab and also some other parts of India. Despite regional differences, however, the visible consequences of colonial rule were very similar. These included the emergence of new proprietary concepts in land, the auction of land belonging to revenue defaulters (which created a market for land) and the increased role of town-based moneylenders and speculators in agriculture. An important factor that had a significant bearing in all this was the change made by the British to the currency and finance policy of earlier rulers. In this chapter the author creates "a framework, within which the transformation of Indian agriculture... took place" (p 65).

Chapter 4 can be clubbed with Chapter 2, because, as a logical sequence, it specifically deals with this transformation. The first half of this chapter describes at length the state of agriculture in the region in 1800 – the methods of cultivation and irrigation, the local variations in fertility and levels of cultivation and the "lively and economically active" towns and population centres (p 105). It is argued that the agro-economic situation in the

Book review

Colonialism and Ecology

BRITISH RULE ON INDIAN SOIL:
NORTH INDIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Michael Mann

trans. from German by Benedict Baron

Manohar, New Delhi. 244 pp. Price Rs. 475

Central Doab was depicted as poor by later British administrators because of their desire to increase commercial agriculture, and hence revenue demand, to unprecedented levels. The second part of the chapter explains the change brought about by British agrarian policy. Through forced commercialisation, the Doab was systematically developed into a large-scale cotton-growing region in order to produce the commodity at world market prices. Government loans were advanced to farmers for the cultivation of cash crops. Indian moneylenders began intervening in the agricultural market again on an increasing scale. Food crop production, despite their rising prices, lost out to the cultivation of more valuable crops. Cotton production increased dramatically and cash crops came to occupy not only the best lands, but also a larger portion of the canal-irrigated area (pp. 132-3). This did not however, increase the productivity of cash crops. The ecological impact of intensive cropping and the extension of cultivation on soil fertility, says Mann, was already becoming apparent.

Chapters 3 and 5 (approximately 51 pages) together constitute the second broad division of the book. The purpose behind the third chapter, the author explains, is to provide "an overview showing the attacks on the natural balance of forests, their consequences, and the clear connection between ecology and economics" (p 67). It is here, therefore, that the theoretical foundations for Chapter 5 are laid. After recounting, all too briefly, the history of the commercial evaluation and exploitation of forests in India and a few other parts of the world, Mann proceeds to describe what he titles the "ecological relevance of forests" (pp. 73-82). The last portion of this chapter deals with the ecology of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, which was altered almost completely when the agrarian economy shifted from what according to the author was a "self-sufficient subsistence farming" to a system that was based on "soil intensive cash crop production." Extensive clearance of *dhak* forests for extending cultivation further caused salination and "thus contributed to a form of desertification" (p. 91).

Following the logic of the author's argument, the changes described in Chapter 3 resulted in the "ecological and economic catastrophe" detailed in Chapter 5. Till 1800 the large forested areas of the Central Doab enabled the

maintenance not only of an ecological balance but also of a locally sustainable agrarian economy. Systematic deforestation brought about by the British thereafter resulted in agricultural decline. Among the consequences of ecological change listed by the author are: increased swings in the quality of precipitation (p 149); an increase in temperature on the one hand and frequent frost on the other (p 151); cholera (p 152); soil degradation (pp. 153-4) and a drop in agricultural yield (p 155). Perhaps the most dramatic consequence, says the author, was a fall in the water table, which severely affected agriculture. It prompted the colonial administration to advance *taqavi* loans to build wells, but these too were intended to encourage the cultivation of sugarcane.

The third portion of the book (Chapters 6 and 7) deals with the disastrous human consequences of colonial policy. The author suggests that unprecedented commercialisation of the agrarian economy created a rural proletariat that barely managed to survive. Food shortages and famine resulted from a situation in which population grew, cultivation of cash crop for the world market increased, but food production fell. Mann argues that "the Central Doab shows the direct consequences of the transformation of an indigenous agrarian economy into a colonial one" (p 169). What followed is a story of human misery. Famine occurred in 1813-14 and 1817-18. But it was during the erratic years of 1833-36 and the famine in 1837-38 that starvation, smallpox and cholera decimated the population. Cultivated area in large parts of the Doab declined sharply. The author substantiates his argument by a detailed discussion of the changing demography of the region. Despite the disastrous consequences of their policy, the British rulers continued to seek administrative answers for what was essentially an "eco-economic" problem.

The overall social impact that colonialism had on the Central Doab is brought out in Chapter 7. Inability of assesses to pay high rates of land revenue frequently resulted in the mortgaging or sale of land to creditors. The sale and purchase of estates due to accumulated revenue arrears and increasing intervention of financiers and speculators brought about shifts in the landownership pattern of different castes, particularly in old cultivation areas. What colonial rule

effected was a "change in the entire social framework through the creation of a land capital market." Commercialised agriculture and oppressive taxation radically transformed the North Indian environment, economy and village social structure.

British Rule on Indian Soil is a well-researched and systematically argued book. A large number of archival sources have been examined, and the picture thus created illustrates a larger (and by now familiar) narrative in which British rule is the turning point at which South Asian society and economy took on so many of the hues that coloured it throughout the 20th century. That does not however, make all arguments entirely indisputable. There are several points on which the reader might choose to disagree with the author. Numerous sweeping statements contained in the chapter titled 'Ecological Destabilisation' – and upon which so much of the book's ecological argument is based – may really not be the truisms that the author assumes them to be. Other parts of the book too have their share of unsubstantiated statements. For example, there is little evidence to support the author's statement that "deforestation around the Mughal centres in the seventeenth century had led to the desert's expansion and caused the water table to sink" (p 135). Nor does Irfan Habib make any mention of this, even though he is referred to in the footnote! Furthermore, to argue that intensive well irrigation also resulted in a fall in the water table (p 159) may be an overestimation of the efficiency of animal or human operated water-lifting systems – especially at a time when the water level had already dropped considerably due to consecutive and unusually dry seasons.

But more importantly, however, it is the author's assumption that the pre-colonial economy was entirely subsistence oriented and devoid of connection with the world market (pp. 12, 128, 213) that can be seriously questioned. Several regional economies in the Mughal Empire were not only closely linked to distant international markets, but were also highly commercialised. Parts of the Central Doab certainly lay within the influence of one such regional economy with global connections. Recent research provides us good reason to believe that with the decline of centralised Mughal rule, crucial socio-economic transformations in much of South Asia were beginning to take place even before the establishment of British rule. While many fundamental changes were certainly brought about by direct colonial rule, it appears that the author may have oversimplified, if not overstated, the effects of its impact so early in the nineteenth century.

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The Mahabharata has had a perennial and undying appeal for the European mind and imagination, an interest that easily dates back to the late 18th century when Indologists had just about begun to roll their agenda off the conveyor belt. This period witnessed a sudden upsurge, even proliferation, of commentaries and treatises on *The Mahabharata*, a process that aimed at giving an entirely new direction to the philosophical speculation or inquiry on this significant cultural text.

Ironically enough, this renewal of interest had also coincided with the process of colonisation in India and the crisis of nationalism in Europe in general and England in particular. No wonder, the Indologists felt compelled to make repeated attempts to 'purify' or 'sanitise' *The Mahabharata* in an effort to 'civilise' it as well as make it more manageable for their own critical or political purposes. If Soren Sorenson talked in terms of deconstructing an Ur-Text of *The Mahabharata* out of what Oldenberg had once described as a "monstrous chaos," Adolf Holtzmann refused to recognise it as a *dharmashastra*. Regardless of how they chose to respond to it, the underlying assumption was simply to vulgarise or inferiorise *The Mahabharata* and by so doing, inferiorise the very people or the race to which the text essentially belonged.

To put it another way, a brand of Orientalism could be said to have marred the very process of the early reception of *The Mahabharata*. But what is indeed mystifying, even somewhat problematic, is that the debate on *The Mahabharata* continues to be centred around much the same questions upon which it had initially been grounded by the Indologists. Despite the fact that we now pride ourselves on having reached a crucial phase in post-coloniality, one of the most significant of our cultural texts continues to be hamstrung by a colonial mind-set and its mouldy straightjacket. What is perhaps worse is that with Indology having become an industry in the West, most of the critiques on *The Mahabharata* consistently refuse to relocate the critical questions on this stupendous literary work. Though Nicholas Sutton claims to have ploughed a fresh ground in his voluminous and well-researched book *Religious Doctrines in the Mahabharata*, he, too, ends up traversing the familiar terrain.

Having rejected the "historical criticism" of Hopkins as an inexact science, Sutton declares his decided preference for the text-critical method rather early on in the book. Positing *The Mahabharata* as a unitary work with a definitive ethical message, he sets out to excavate diverse religious

Book review

Textual Analysis of the Mahabharata

RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES IN THE MAHABHARATA

by Nicholas Sutton

MotiLal BanarsiDass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi
2000, Pp. 477 Rs. 250/-

doctrines of Hindu thought embedded in it. For this purpose, he segments the entire text under different heads such as Epic Soteriology, Epic Theism, Epic Eschatology, or Epic's teachings on Ethics, Destiny, Humanity, Origin of the World, Gender and the like. Sutton is categorical about having distanced himself from the structuralists such as Biardeau, Dumézil and others, who insist upon exploring the doctrinal tensions and dissonance within the text, wherever these are found. And in this respect, he claims to have followed the cue of the Indian scholars, who read it as a *dharmashastra*, thus avoiding the familiar trap of viewing *The Mahabharata* as a "dismally intractable text" with "a forbidding size" that Western scholarship often gets into. Following the best traditions of text-critical methodology, Sutton sets about disentangling complex, often confusing strands of religious doctrines running through the multicoloured tapestry of Hindu thought.

Proceeding on the premise that *The Mahabharata* "reflects the contradictions of an age of transition," as elegantly put forward by Prof G.C. Pande, Sutton goes on to establish how the epic thought is nothing but a synthesis of Vedic orthodoxy and non-Aryan belief systems. By arguing that the epic is about the post-Vedic society in which the "tribal practices of Aryans such as 'yajna' had become substantively reduced" he seeks to historicise ancient India in linear, sequential terms. Undeterred by the fact that such a notion of history has now become problematic, Sutton further hypothesises, this time after Greg Bailey, that the synthesis is to be located in three value systems centred on *pravrtti*, *nivrtti* and *bhakti*. Interestingly enough, he first sets up *pravrtti* (Vedic) and *nivrtti* (post-Vedic) as two divergent world-views and then attempts to resolve this opposition in *bhakti*. While his understanding of ancient Indian history betrays a sense of continuity, his interpretation of Hindu thought appears to stress discontinuity or rupture. Despite his claims to the contrary, his dialectical under-

standing of Hindu thought inevitably pushes him into the trap of binarism that a structuralist often finds hard to escape.

Elaborating upon the intrinsic differences in two value-systems, Sutton says, "The fundamental difference between the two tendencies is that *pravrtti* embodies an essentially social view of religious life in which the individual is allotted a specific position in the created order with a clearly defined relationship to all other beings. The values associated with *nivrtti* define human beings in an entirely different way, not purely in relation to the social and created order but as an individual who exists only in relation to himself" (p 12). Apparently, this highly differentiated view of the two tendencies fails to take into account their complementary status and/or relationship that Hindu thought often stresses. It needs to be pointed out here that Vedas treat 'yajna' as not just another set of practices but also a harmonious state of mind; not only an action but also a thought; not only an external manifestation but also an internal belief. On closer scrutiny, Sutton's binarism is found to be nothing more than an oversimplified reductionism that mirrors dualism in Sutton's mind as much as it mirrors it in the Western thought. Perhaps, it's pertinent to point out here that if there's anything that the Western mind finds rather puzzling, even disconcerting, about Hindu thought, it's the notion of multiplicity or plurality inherent in it. And as far as this goes, Nicholas Sutton's thesis is no exception either.

Faced with the task of reconciling a bewildering variety of Indian philosophical systems, all that Sutton manages to do is to give a highly selective, subjective, somewhat cursory overview of each. He is of the view that, among other things, the authors of *The Mahabharata* had an access to a variety of systems inscribed in such diverse works as *The Vedas*, *The Upanisads*, *The Vedanta Sutras*, *Pancaratra Literature*, *Dharma Sastras*, *Samkhya* and *Yoga Sutras*, and *Puranas*. Undoubtedly, he does support this claim rather ably by

citing the relevant textual material, which, he says, is available mostly in the *Santi Parvan* and *Amusana Parvan*. But what makes his position somewhat dubious, if not untenable, is his own admission that, at least, some of these sources date back to a period later than that of *The Mahabharata*. It appears as though history is no more than a convenient ploy or an expedient tool for Sutton, a mere handmaiden of his thesis and so can easily be bent, twisted, telescoped or discarded at will.

While this might be dismissed as failure of a certain form of historicism he's implicated in, there's no doubting Sutton's skills as an archaeologist. Throughout the book, he handles his digging tools rather well, excavating the textual evidence rather assiduously. So much so that not a single contention of his goes unsupported by whatever little shreds of evidence there are in *The Mahabharata*. This kind of close attention to the text in question is, undoubtedly, Sutton's strong point, yet sometimes his own text fails to pass a very close scrutiny. Especially when he ends up repeating not just his own arguments but also the very same words in which these arguments are often couched. For instance, the twin concepts of *pravrtti* and *nivrtti* are sought to be defined no less than five times over (see pp. 10-11, 76-77, 135-36, 363-64 and 381-82), and what is worse, each time the language is much the same. A fit case of overkill, the book definitely does over explain itself. An average Indian scholar with a slight knowledge of Hindu philosophical thought might find such explanations irritating, if not entirely superfluous. One gets the feeling as though Sutton is constantly engaged in a self-conscious, self-reflexive act of translating the complexities of Hindu thought unto himself as well as others. Now that brings us to another important question: for whom did Sutton write this book, or who constituted its target audience?

That this is not entirely a speculative question is evident from the fact that the Christian world-view is repeatedly invoked in course of the discussion as a definitive frame of reference.

The whole idea of 'religious doctrine' or 'religious organisation,' as applied to Hindu thought in Chapter 3, appears to be no more than a throwback to that historic debate between Protestants and Catholics, which had virtually split the entire Europe at the dawn of Renaissance. To put it differently, the questions of crucial importance to Sutton's thesis are not raised from 'within' the structures of Hindu thought but rather from 'without.' This becomes glaringly

more conspicuous as the discussion slowly progresses. And nowhere does it communicate itself so strongly as in Chapter 11, where *The Mahabharata's* teachings on gender are made the focus of attention. Conscious of the fact that gender equality is a by-product of Western liberal ideology, Sutton says, "Despite persistent discrimination against women in society, the debate in favour of gender equality has been won in the West and also among a substantial section of the westernised intelligentsia in India." What is indeed shocking is that sometimes a rhetorical statement, unsupported by any evidence, empirical or otherwise, is made into the very basis of critical enquiry. In such cases, where the methodology is questionable and the hypothesis fragile, even the most laudable conclusions are likely to strike a jarring falsetto.

More in the nature of a compilation than an exegetical work, *Religious Doctrines in the Mahabharata* is really an attempt at organising, classifying and synthesising a range of ideas that is simply staggering. Of course, the effort is quite a bold one, though it isn't as confident as it might appear at first sight. What makes it somewhat shaky is its schematic, segmented character, its hurriedly drawn conclusions, its endless repetitions and its occasional slippage into a self-cancelling procedure. However, what disappoints about this book the most is its failure to cut through the sheath of traditional scholarship. While cutting a fairly wide swathe, it remains hopelessly circumscribed in its methodological procedures and/or practices.

The present thesis of Nicholas Sutton stands on the same principle upon which the Indological excursions had invariably rested, namely, the Kantian notion of organic unity. Operating scrupulously within this all-too-familiar territory, he refuses to engage with the indeterminate, unstable nature of either 'text' or 'textuality.' And as such, he chooses to ignore all those questions, which are invariably connected with the processes of cultural production of *The Mahabharata*. It needs to be pointed out here that the long history of how this epic was constituted as a text does call attention towards its own processes of production as much as it does towards a sense of history embedded in it. So long as the critical endeavour is not directed towards this end, there's very little possibility of saying something startlingly new about *The Mahabharata*.

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