of ideas that often arrange itself to a central theme of 'meaning' of aesthetic and literary experience. This provides a grasp for critical thinking and incisive analysis. With his two decades of teaching of Aesthetics, Malshe is able to generate a considerable hybridity that criss-crosses theories with texts and puts them in a lucid juxtaposition. His commitment to British analytic philosophy, of course, gives him a not so fashionable and yet a rigour that makes the book stand out.

Notes

1. Frantz Kafka, *"Prometheus" in Parables and Paradoxes*, translated by Wilma and Edwin Muir, New York: Schoken, 1970: 83.
2. Giles Deleuze concept of 'deterritorialization' means an endless dissemination of signs on the surface of the text that is transferred onto the very process of production of signs. See, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guttari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (1972), Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1983: 292-3.

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Vikram Seth: An Anthology of Recent Criticism, edited by G.J.V Prasad, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2004, pp.185, Rs 400.

By any standard, Vikram Seth is a striking literary phenomenon of our time. He has made impressive running in both fiction and non-fiction, as well as in poetry. Yet he has not made critical impact on par with his peers. The volume under review in the form of twelve papers on Seth's varied range of works fills a long-felt gap. These well-written essays—all freshly commissioned contributions except two reprints—focus on *From Heaven Lake* (1983), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993), and *An Equal Music* (1999). The comprehensive assemblage of explorations aims at opening, as the blurb announces, 'various windows into Seth's world to enhance the reader's understanding and appreciation of this highly talented and most accessible writer'. How does the book deliver on the promise? Moderately well, I would say.

Allaying Seth's fears, as it were, Hugo Brunner, the publisher of *From Heaven Lake*, rang up the author the day before its official publication: 'Don't jump into the Thames if there is a bad review or no review at all.' Much to the surprise of the publisher and the author, the book was well-received and was also awarded the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. Seth's perceptive and delightful account of his travel experience from North China—across Tibet and the Himalayas over to Nepal and India—is discussed by Nandini Chandra in her paper 'A Different Gaze: Vikram Seth's Journey through Mainland China'. Unlike Paul Theroux in his *Down the Yangtze*, published in the same year as *From Heaven Lake*, Seth does not wax magisterial in his observations. He is more nuanced and less judgmental, without any 'overt ethnographic mission', as Nandini notes. Also unlike Rahul Sankrityayan, the Marxist traveller from India in the first half of the 20th century, Seth does not dwell on 'the legendary and historical mystique of Tibet'. In spite of the freedom deficit in the Maoist dispensation, Seth sees reassuring evidence of efficiency and professionalism in Chinese society, and hence his gaze is different from the available perspectives on the mystical orient.

Although Seth is drawn to the 'warm humanity of common people' in the account of his hitchhiking adventure—not that he is not unaffected by ideological imprint on people in their quotidian transactions—his motivations are different from those that we see in Amitav Ghosh's travel accounts of Egypt, Myanmar and Cambodia with a rich diet of historical detail. Seth seeks to recover the real China from beneath the veil of ideology, but his itinerary follows a liberal trajectory in cutting contrast with Ghosh's committed mission. In a vein different from Naipaul's in his early travel accounts of India, Seth's slant is not dismissive of either Chinese cultural heritage or its ongoing, de-ideologised economic boom. Seth highlights the people, as well as pans across the landscape, without any colonial fixation or postcolonial position. However, cursory references to the Hindi writer, Rahul Sankrityayan as well as to Amitav Ghosh and Naipaul in Nandini's frame of reference needed further exploration.

Four papers in this anthology are devoted to Seth's poetry. While GJV Prasad and KC Boral evaluate Seth's poetic craft and thematic preoccupations in *The Humble Administrator's Garden* and *All You Who Sleep Tonight* respectively, Tabish Khair and Angelie Multani look at *The Golden Gate* with disparate points of view. Both Prasad and Baral give full marks to Seth for his technical accomplishment. Prasad provides explicatory snapshots of many poems from the anthology to underline Seth's formal control and compression of details as well as his

quiet irony and humour. He shows how Seth excels in delicious enunciation of loneliness, dry-eyed rhyming banter and is capable of making aphoristic statements leavened with wit. In the same vein, Baral demonstrates Seth's controlled elegance and seasoned craftsmanship evident from the poems in *All You who Sleep Tonight*. Design or formal finish is a salient feature of Seth's art. Even in a short lyric he can articulate delightfully- worded cognition of life's complexities and contradictions—a rare feat in Indian English poetry.

On the other hand, Tabish, a poet and novelist as well as a professional academic, raises the problem of narrating non-anglophone Indians in English. According to him, Seth's success in *The Golden Gate* is based on 'avoiding the problems of formulating a prosodic identity in Indian poetry in English'. In other words, Seth's *tour de force* has not created critical space for the reading of Indian English poetry on the accentual and prosodic terms germane to Indian English. Seth has received flak for keeping this novel in verse set in California 'thankfully free' of Indian connection and he makes no bones about it being Indian. But Tabish's argument does not stand up too well in the face of Seth's adroit versification in *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991). The poet does harness several accessories of speech to capture and authenticate the stuff of Indian experience, and his unusual resourcefulness proclaims his mastery of the medium. I would have thought Tabish would examine the issue of 'the fissured nature of the language', or the 'grapholectal' handicaps of the medium in Indian English poetry with reference to Seth's compelling poetry anchored in Indian realities, or the occasional verse in *A Suitable Boy* that flavours with the novel for that matter. Besides, Tabish withholds his appreciation for Seth's clean representation of experience as well as his considerable talent for recharging a conventional form of expression such as the sonnet with new possibilities by eschewing, what reviewers say of Janet's creations, 'The languid tedium of lines . . . the artist's dated chains'.

The companion piece on *The Golden Gate* by Angelie Multani, however, deals with an assortment of love stories in a metropolitan setting. The depiction of consumerist, sterile and emotionally desiccated life in the sonnet-sequence from the vantage point of authorial standards extends beyond the immediate scenic backcloth. Angelie argues that even as Seth draws upon the Californian mores and milieu, his reaffirmation of stable family life with steady ties across the range of relationships in modern metropolitan society is amenable to cross-cultural implications. The verse narrative hallmarks the operative concerns in Seth canon.

As befits its massive size and range, Seth's magnum opus, *A Suitable Boy*, has claimed largest space in the form of four essays written with considerable theoretical sophistication. Neelam Srivastava and Priya Kumar engage with Seth's affirmation of secularism in the novel, but they press the point along divergent lines: Neelam reads the novel as 'a Nehruvian narrative of Indian state and society', whereas Priya problematizes Seth's endorsement of Nehruvian secularism for its ' paternalistic assumptions' and makes a plea for an alternative conception of the identity of religious and ethnic minorities to contain the resurgence of religious exclusivism and the dangers of current cultural regression in a secular nation-state like India. However, both Neelam and Priya consider A *Suitable Boy* as Seth's intervention in 'the Indian political situation of the 1990s' (Srivastava 87), or 'the politics of Hindu nationalism in the 80s and 90s in India' (Kumar138) by way of a historical novel.

In the microcosmic fictional setting of the novel in the imaginary town of Brahmpur representing the heart of India with institutional underpinnings like the State Legislative Assembly as a representative space for various communities, languages and points of view, and in the use of English subsuming regional inflections as well as the use of free indirect speech whereby the authorial voice takes a rationalist, secular position on the contentious issues of the nation, Seth replicates Nehru's liberal, tolerant and pluralistic outlook. On the other hand, in the private sphere attachment to one's religion, exemplified by Mrs Mahesh Kapoor's piety, is affirmed, and her husband's intransigent secularist orthodoxy or interventionist anti-religiosity is derided. Neelam suggests that while Nehruvian secularism has allowed many obscurantist religious practices to continue in the garb of culture or refined and restrained religious commitments, it has nevertheless held the country together. Inevitably, Seth reinstates Nehruvian ideals as an antidote to the inter-faith flashpoints in contemporary India. Finally, Neelam argues that *A Suitable Boy* 'presents a return to strong state secularism' which is referentially not equivalent to any establishmentarian

imposition, or establishment of irreligion.

In Priya's opinion, it is not only state or political secularism that Seth reiterates but also ethical secularism, and there lies the rub. She borrows the terms 'political secularism' and 'ethical secularism' from Rajeev Bhargava's essay 'Giving Secularism its Due' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, June 9, 1994:1784-1791) to differentiate state/ constitutional secularism from an ethics of tolerance. The latter, in Priya's sense of the term, based on the notion of majority-minority syndrome, militates against substantive equity and makes secularism unsustainable in a modern nation-state. However, Priya sidesteps the mutually--interlocking actions in which a minority too precipitates its marginalization by inventing imaginary grievances and mounting unreasonable backlash. The need of the hour is not only to rethink about the place of religious and ethnic minorities, as Priya argues, but to dissolve the majority-minority syndrome. It is possible only when, as Bhargava notes ('India's Majority-Minority Syndrome', *Open Democracy*, 7 August 2002), Hindus really value ideas of equal citizenship and Muslims adopt positive attitude to liberal and democratic institutions, shunning conservative communitarianism. To invoke Bhargava again, Seth's novel, besides insisting on interventionist secularisation, endorses 'the pluralist version of ethical secularism which is both secular and communitarian' (Bhargava 1790). Thus Priya's critical investment in Bhargava's term does not put any gloss on the notion of tolerance in the secularist discourse.

There is not much point in Priya's argument either that 'Muslim characters are figured largely along standard archetypes' in the novel and that it has 'modern secularist Muslim sensibility' missing. People like the Nawab of Baitar, his sons, and the singer Saeeda Bai as well as Rasheed, are all very sympathetically portrayed. Some characters lose their sharpness along the axis of the urban-rural divide, not along the axis of Hindu-Muslim binary. If a modern and secular Islamic sensibility is not very markedly present in the novel, it is simply because such a sensibility did not exist in the post-Partition India, or perhaps does not exist even now. Seth is realistic in showing the limits to secular disposition in the Indian Muslim community in a story attached to its temporal co-ordinates; however, he does depict secular longings and liberal outlook at least in a handful of characters—and Rasheed stands out among them. In his Islamic take on secularism he questions the visibly monochrome, ossified image of Islam and brings religiosity closer to modern, rational outlook. There is palpable prejudice against change in the larger part of the community buttressing the misperception of Islam as a hostile monolith and adversary of the heritage of enlightenment and reformation. Rasheed bestirs himself, envisages legitimate dimensions of human progress and despises narrow religiosity, and so he flies in the face of conventional Islamic mores and is tossed away by the regnant Islamic orthodoxy. It is a part of the novel's secularism that Kabir and his family are identified as Muslim but without the conventional Islamic markers.

In an altogether different take on the complex filigree of themes in Seth's novel, Jon Mee invokes Johannes Fabian's scientific, secular idea of time in anthropological discourse and Dipesh Chakrabarty's accounts of the problematics of postcolonial historiography in his book *Provincializing Europe*. Mee argues that *A Suitable Boy*, as a historical novel, is part of a universalized transition narrative even as the author sets out to show India as a robust postcolonial nation on the cusp of tradition and modernity. In contrast with Harish Trivedi's reading of the novel, Mee notes that the discourse of Indian modernity in the novel concedes the priority of a master narrative scripted in Europe. Mee's argument is quite cogent, but not credible enough. Modernity in India is rather entrenched, and it does not belong to a single tradition. Nor is it heading in any single direction, privileging a European narrative of development. Mee is wary of an allegorical reading of the novel and points out that Seth keeps colonialism and modernism apart. However, Mee flattens out the panoply of sub-themes to drive his conclusion. Seth's harsh satire on Arun Mehra's excessive Anglophilia is intertwined with the narrator's negative depiction of Meenakshi and Kakoli's fascination for Western liberation and modernity. Thus it is difficult to agree with Mee's view that the narrative of modernity in *A Suitable Boy* derives from a single source. In fact, it exemplifies decentred polyvalency; in other words, it is open-ended and variegated. As Amartya Sen has noted, '[G]iven the long and tangled roots of recent intellectual developments, and given the mixture of origins in the genesis of the ideas and the methods that are typically taken to characterize modernism' (*The New Republic*, April 1, 1996: 32), modernity is not a well-defined, unproblematically acceptable concept.

Also, Mee misses to see the representation of Urdu in the novel,

except as 'nostalgia for a feudal world of Urdu literature and courtly entertainments' (Mee 119). Seth has the Nawab Sahib of Baitar express genuine concern about Urdu: 'Next week he (LN Agarwal) will try to force his Hindi bill through the Legislative Assembly, and Urdu, my language, the language of Mast, the language of most of the Muslims of this province, will be made more useless than ever' (*ASB* 998).

The mediation of historical material with reference to the depiction of rural space in *A Suitable Boy* vis-à-vis that in Phanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Anchal* (The Soiled Border), a Hindi novel published in 1954, has been examined by Angela Eyre. A common narrative strand between the two novels is the Zamindari Abolition Bill. While the intended beneficiaries of the bill are articulate and eminently visible in Renu's novel, those in Seth's novel are too weak and isolated. However, both novels narrate the failure of the land reform measure—*Maila Anchal* with a wealth of details and *A Suitable Boy* with the pathetic plight of the destitute serf, Kaccheru. The difference in the representation of peasantry, as Angela rightly says, proceeds from the difference in the narrative form of the two novels. The capacious frame of *A Suitable Boy* cuts a large swathe of India in an encompassing formation which substantially outweighs the thinness of rural representation, unlike Maila *Anchal*'s focused regional locale.

Seth's next novel, *An Equal Music*, in a complete departure from *A Suitable Boy*, is basically set in London, except when it goes to Vienna and Venice, and this matter of location piques Mala Pandurang. She problematizes Seth's cosmopolitan transnationalism in the absence of 'a humanist *worldliness*'. As the cultural map of the world remains divided between the metropolis and the margin, 'personal core of cosmopolitanism is not enough'. But, as Seth said to Jay Currie and Michele Denis in an interview (June 1999 online, np), the situation in *An Equal Music* did not warrant any laying of his ethnicity on it. Besides Mala's cogent critique, Meenakshi Bharat views this novel through the lens of ecocriticism, while Anjana Sharma is chary of approving Seth's phallocentric choice of the fictive patterning with denial of agency to women. Anjana forgets Seth's fictional credo wherein Julia'a decision to stick with her husband and son is in line with Lata's choice for Haresh in *A Suitable Boy* and Liz Dorati's for Phil Weiss in *The Golden Gate*. When it comes to choosing family for Seth, no feminist breaking out, or no concession to romantic passion for that matter.

Finally, a few words about the book's production. I lack the space to list the typos; suffice it to say that they are many and will need to be weeded out in the next print. The bibliography is not up to date. At any rate, I think it is severely incomplete. It is not precise either. For instance: it is not mentioned which paper in Meenakshi Mukherjee's book, *The Perishable Empire*, discusses Seth's work. Besides, there is no index to refer the reader to pages in the text. But it is churlish to cavil about these omissions. They are less obvious and must be seen against the real virtues of the book.

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The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North West Frontier, by Mukulika Banerjee, Oxford University Press, James Curry; Santa Fe: SAR Press and Delhi, 2000.

This is a study of the work of the Khudai Khidmatgar (servants of God, from now on wards KK) led by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan known popularly as frontier Gandhi and Badshah Khan. 'Most of the Khudai Khidmatgars had not had many previous opportunities to tell their stories of struggle and heroism' (p.7). In this remarkable study combining the insights of ethnography, oral history and critical cultural studies, the author talks to 'surviving Pathan member of the KK in order to discuss what it was that made ordinary Pathans adopt non-violence' (p.4). Under the charismatic leadership of Badshah Khan, the Pathans of North West Frontier province (NWFP) adopted the path of non-violence in solving their own problems as well as fighting against the British. Badshah Khan devoted himself to education, social reforms and sanitation improvement of his fellow Pathans. Badshah Khan led the life of a *faqir* spending more than 'twenty-years fervently trekking in the villages of settled districts' (p.77). Banerjee presents us an intimate portrait of the life and work of Badshah Khan as well as the Khudai Khidmatgar movement. Her explanation of this 'profound social creativity' (p.16) is carried out in the context of the Orientalist view of the Pathans as violent, and dangerous held not only by the British but also by some of the nationalist leaders of India.

KK or Servants of God was launched in November 1929 and it built upon the earlier two decades