Book Reviews

Jagat Pati Joshi, *Harappan Architecture and Civil Engineering*, Delhi: Rupa in association with Infinity Foundation, 2008. pp. xxxv + 218; line drawings, photographs.

The chapters in this book comprise a sketch of the discovery of Harappan sites; the periods before the Mature Harappan cities came to flourish; settlement patterns; the "principal Harappan settlement types"; town planning; hydraulic engineering; "religious architecture"; "burial architecture"; building techniques, tools and materials; and the post-urban period. Much of the text is perfunctory rather than discursive, and the reader is not told what constitutes the architectural characteristics or range of Harappan cities, leave alone what makes certain techniques of construction "Harappan".

The first chapter contains a long quotation from Alexander Cunningham on his discovery of Harappa, his plan of the site; a brief reference to nomenclature; and references to matters such as Mackay's excavation of Chanhu-daro and Stein's exploration along the bed of the Ghaggar. It then describes the extent of the Harappa civilization. Some other chapters, likewise, seem to have been rather hastily put together. There are occasional oversights as in the second chapter on the development phases: for instance, the chapter does not benefit from Jarrige's splendid analysis on how building construction evolved over the centuries at Mehrgarh; there is no reference to the enigmatic structures at Amri with their double rows of small cells (did they comprise structures in themselves or were they foundations for houses built in light materials?) or to the fact that stone-slab construction at Kulli posed a problem of where to locate the doorway of a room. We are not told how the relative frequencies of unbaked and baked bricks differed from the formative period to the urban period; similarly we are not told how masonry or wall width in the earlier period established the tradition(s) of Harappan house construction. Through the various chapters, in fact, Joshi has put together matter about one site after the other, without attempting any comparison or contrast between sites or even between regions. We are taught at school that the thick walls at Mohenjo-daro speak for upper storeys: but at which other Harappan sites does this phenomenon prevail? Or is Mohenjo-daro unique in this matter? Is Mohenjo-daro unique in the use of party halls between adjoining houses? (Party walls have important social implications, but like upper storeys are not discussed in this book.)

The list of site sizes (p. 42 and also 44) uses sources that are now out of date. Regarding settlement patterns we are told (p. 45) that Harappan settlements were located mainly along the major perennial rivers, but one would have thought that this would merit a couple of pages on the exceptional habitat of Kutch. This especially from a field archaeologist whose fame rests largely on his explorations in Kutch and his masterly excavation of Surkotada and its fortification.

The chapter on principal settlement types does not seek out "types", it only gives a jogtrot of data from individual sites, that too incomplete data: fenestration, the use of rows of pillars to support the roof that spans an exceptionally large area, and the difficulties of lining wells with brick are themes that find no discussion. Again, why did the morphology of the settlement of Kalibangan change in the transition from the Early Harappan to the Mature phase? Possible explanations would have been welcome. Perfunctory compilations of matter (often not directly relevant to the subject of the book) have thus given little to the reader to chew on. A notable exception is the brief but interesting description of the Lothal dock basin (pp. 60 and 123-127) which is the only one I know that explains the relevance of the exceptionally huge tidal range (more than 10 m) in the Gulf of Khambat to the design and construction of the vertical-walled dockyard basin, its inlets, and its spillway.

Another interesting contribution is Joshi's remark that excavators at Harappan sites have often missed the foundation trenches of large walls (p. 166), except in the case of the Kalibangan perimeter wall (pp. 166-67) , and the repaired Bagasra perimeter wall (p. 170). Joshi sees this kind of deep foundation as an alternative to the construction of buildings atop high platforms of mud or unbaked brick.

There is little description (except on p. 106 regarding

Banawali) of various excavated streets in Harappan towns: this is not an unimportant subject, for streets are the arteries that connect the lives and activities of the residents, they are the transitions between public and private space and provide the points of urban interaction. Such matters would have been more welcome than mechanical reproductions of Marshall's tabulations of brick sizes, for instance (pp. 172, 173).

Many questions remain unasked in this book. What would the marks of religious (as opposed to a residential or craft-production) building be (Chapter 7)? Assuming that baked brick would not be easy to produce at Dholavira (given the scarcity of alluvial mud on Khadir island), in what way would the lining of the exceptionally large well at this site with stone masonry have proved a challenge to masons brought up on a tradition of brick-lined wells? What makes the baked brick masonry of Mohenjo-daro so fine that exposed walls still stand, metres high, at the site? What precisely are the differences in working with sundried brick and baked brick? In which other early Indian settlements do we find the use of English bond and Flemish bond as at Mohenjo-daro?

Perhaps the failure to pose such problems lie in the overall approach to the writing of a book. The preface (pp. xi-xv) by the President of the Infinity Foundation , an NGO founded by Indians abroad, is telling. The absence of good histories of science and technology in India, in contrast to the several volumes brought out by Needham, is bemoaned. Spiritualism should not blot out Indian achievements in the material sphere. "Brand India" (p. xii)—perish the clichÈ—should be projected to boost Indian confidence and the legitimacy of diverse unwritten people's traditions. Thus the aim of the Infinity Foundation is to "build India's brand" and knowledge of her "cultural capital and soft power". India needs her own brand in the same sense as the "brands" of China or Japan or France. Publications on the history of Indian science and technology will reveal, the preface goes on to say, the rationality, innovation, and multi-cultural moorings of Indianness. This will take us away from the "caste, cows and curry" stereotype (p. xiii) to a shared past for nation-building (p. xiv). One cannot but agree with the last, but is there such a thing as Indianness or Indian essence?

Nothing can reveal the dangers of such thinking as the preface-writer's description of the "brands" of different countries. For Germany, "manufacturing" is one factor, besides "precision". France's "brand" lies (p. xiii) in "beauty/aesthetics: cosmetics, fashion, wine, Cannes, tourism". Does the writer not know about Bach, Beethoven and Brahms in Germany, whose music is, today, played by the world? Does he not know about the lattice-ironwork , 324-m high Eiffel Tower in Paris, built as early as 1889, a world icon constructed without intermediate floors that sways in the wind? Does he not know about France's legacy to the world in the idea of universal human rights, the rights to which "all men without exception", not just the French, are born? The writer of the preface is in fact doing to France and Germany what the stereotype of caste, curry, and cows does to Indian civilization. This is a warning that essentialization ends up in trivialization and that it is dangerous. We cannot replace one set of clichès with another. If more such volumes are to be produced, let them be planned on carefully-constructed research problems inherent in the subject of science or technology and the societies in which they developed. Let them then be approved or edited by committees of scholars of some standing.

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D. N. Tewari, *The Central Problems of Bhartrhari's Philosophy*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2008. Rs.530

Studies on Indian view of Grammar have been by and large hitherto confined to Samskritists. Writings by mainstream philosophers on Patanjali and Bhratrhari's view of language and grammar are sparse specially in comparison with the amount of work available on traditionally accepted nine schools of Indian philosophy. Prof. Devender Nath Tiwari's 'The Central Problems of Bhartrhari's Philosophy' is a much needed work to fill up this lacuna. Prof. Tiwari has divided the book into a total of nine chapters starting with laying down a document map of the central problems raised in Bhartrhari's Vkyapadia in Chapter-I and concluding with a sixteen pages chapter on a critical estimate of these different problems in context.

Chapter-I of the book titled "Philosophical Problems of Vākyapadīya" opens with a general note on the importance that has been attributed to sravana tradition which Prof. Tiwari defines as "the proper learning of the knowledge of the sacred text" [p-1]. Since the study of the sacred texts is held to be essential by all the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, a proper study of how language functions and yields meaning to us from the text becomes an important issue of consideration. Stating the central thesis of Vākyapadīya, Prof. Tiwari writes, "Bhartrhari's aim in his philosophy of Vākyapadīya is distinctly marked as the interpretation of cognition as revealed in the mind by language in usual

communication (vyavahāra) for clarity and conception that provides bliss." [p-1] Following this he gives an account of number of philosophical problems ranging from issues related to psychology to some basic principles of science that can be traced in Vākyapadīya in explicit or implicit way.

Chapter-II of the book is titled "Concept of Speech Element". Interestingly what Bhartrhari would consider of secondary importance for his scheme of metaphysics is taken up first of all by the author. Though it is not explicitly stated in the book I think the idea behind this approach is that speech is the most concrete and palpable element in language therefore though the original chronology in a speech act in real space and time is unitary and impartite thought, in-depth grammar or syntax and utterance, for the purpose of understanding of the empirical basis of linguistic understanding, it is better to consider utterance first and grammar and thought later on. This is the chronology Prof. Tiwari follows in this book which should facilitate reader's understanding. Chapter-II contains a very comprehensive account of different levels of speech as propounded by Bhartrhari and his theory of sphotv da. In the later half of the chapter Prof. Tiwari presents a very interesting account of polemic between Bhartrhari and Jayanta and Mīmāmsakas.

Unlike in the west, Indian philosophy of language has an elaborate discussion on how words attribute their meaning in a sentence and whether they have any reality of their own apart from their use in a sentence. Bhartrhari has a unique stand on this issue where he denies the reality of words altogether and maintains the sentence to be the smallest meaning bearing unit in language. Prof. Tiwari discusses these issues at length in Chapter-III titled "The Concept of Sentence." First half of the chapter gives an exposition of Padavādin's (word holists) and Akhandavādin's (sentence holists) positions and the later half presents an exhaustive account of the polemic between the two.

Taking the same discussion to a new level Prof. Tiwari gives an in-depth study of metaphysics behind the position of sentence-holists and word-holists, in Chapter-IV of the book which is titled "The Concept of Sentential Meaning." This chapter opens with an account of the Bhartrhari's arguments against Mimāms and Nyāya positions. The latter half of the chapter focuses on some of the metaphysical issues involved in analysis of linguistic understanding. Prof. Tiwari's exposition of the notion of Pratibh and Svabhāva as propounded by Bhartrhari and its juxtaposition with Mimāmasakas notion of bhāvan is rich on clarity and lucidity. But the reader is left a bit wondering at the end of the chapter as to why some portion at the beginning of this chapter should not have been a part of the previous chapter owing to the continuity of the theme.

Keeping with the reverse chronology followed through out the book, Chapter-V of the book titled "The Concept of Word (Pada)" makes a transition from sentential meaning to the concept of words. The main problematic taken up in this chapter is whether words can be recognized as independent meaning bearing units in language given the fact that it is only a sentence which yields to us a workable, useful and practical piece of information or understanding. Prof. Tiwari not only gives an exhaustive survey of different theories on this issue but also compares and contrasts them with their western counterparts wherever possible.

In consonance with the plan followed in Chapter-III and IV of the book, Prof. Tiwari focuses on "The Concept of Word-Meaning (Padārtha)" in Chapter-VI of the book. This chapter makes a transition from epistemology to metaphysics and ontology of the issue of word-meaning. Special feature of this chapter is the thumbnail view of as many as twelve different theories of meaning and their comparison with Bhartrhari's analysis of language by Prof. Tiwari's in the first half of the chapter.

Chapter-VII of the book titled "The Concept of Grammatical Analysis" looks more like an extension of the previous chapter. Here Prof. Tiwari discusses the root and stem distinction in a word, different theories relating to the meaning of suffixes and so on. Looked at closely Chapter-III and IV, Chapter-V and VI, and chapter VII and VIII form different sub-sections of the book and could have been marked so.

Chapter-VIII takes the problem of meaning stated in Chapter I to its broadest level namely 'Relation between Language and Meaning' which is incidentally also the title of this chapter. The focus of this chapter as Prof. Tiwari states, "— is confined to a critical survey of the cognitive and logical analysis of the problem of relation made by cognitive and logical analysis of the problem of relation made by Bhartrhari under the chapter 'Sambandha Sammuddesah', the chapter III of the third part of 'Vākyapadīya'. This chapter mainly deals with analysis of the views of other Indian philosophical systems namely Buddhism, Vaisesika, Mimāmsa, Sāmkhya and Vedānta as Bhartrhari deals with them." [p-377]

Chapter-IX which is the concluding chapter of the book is aptly titled 'Critical Estimate'. In this chapter Prof. Tiwari critically assesses the place for Bhartrhari's theory of meaning among the main approaches towards the study of language specially in the wake of recent developments in this area in the west. Prof. Tiwari

concludes that in an effort to provide a cognitive theory of language Bhartrhari "provides a philosophy free from metaphysical allegiance without feeling any philosophical requirement for a rejection of metaphysics." [p-406]

By the way of general comment on the book I believe that it is by far the most complete and comprehensive work on Bhartrhari's philosophy that has hitherto been published in one single volume. The book is not only rich on lucidity of the exposition of the main concepts in Bhartrhari's Vākyapadīya but is equally rich on an account of the polemic among different schools. Prof. Tiwari has given the western perspective to the problem wherever it seems necessary and possible. His experiment with reverse chronology namely, from sentence to the word-meaning, I think facilitates the reader towards a better understanding of issues at hand. The book is replete with references giving cues to the reader for further reading. Overall I think this book is a milestone as far as studies of Bhartrhari's philosophy are concerned. Looking at the quality of paper, the hardbound edition of this 434 pages book is very reasonably priced by ICPR at 530 Indian Rupees.

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Om Prakash Valmiki, *Amma and Other Stories*, translated with Introduction by Naresh Kumar Jain, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2008. pp. 243, Rs. 595

All the stories in this anthology are about the exploitative and discriminatory practices of the caste system –a ubiquitous social presence in our country likely to take on even worse forms in the coming times. The fifteen stories under review deal with dalit issues and problems such as the question of their identity, the breaking of their silence and its aftermath and the intra-caste rivalries which tend to pull them backwards. It is the pan-dalit imagination which enables Valmiki to present dalit issues both from inside and outside. All the stories have had their origin in the life around the author but they have not been written in the first person except "The Umbrella". In all others, it is the omniscient narrator who speaks through the various situations and characters and probes their minds to the very depths of consciousness. As a storyteller Valmiki tells from direct experience intending to make it the experience of those who are listening to his tales. The dalit imperatives of aesthetics of representing life-affirming values and freeing dalits from their physical and mental slavery and drawing the reader's attention to Ambedkarite values of equality, freedom and justice are met with. Valmiki is committed to the cause of raising the consciousness of both dalits and non-dalits and hence most of his characters tend to become speaking subjects who protest or wish to break away from traditional practices. In the stories under review, the breaking of the subaltern's silence and his non-conformity to conventional demeaning practices are gestures of defiance which are a pointer to the promise of a new era.

Many of Valmiki's characters are composite wholes as they are representative of a community and are thus several people rolled into one. Many of them have been created to be role-models in their desire for change and for nursing hopes which were difficult to realize. A primary example is that of Amma whose ideas and actions critique those conventional ones which had kept those like her suppressed for ages. Her resolve to keep her children away from a life of shame, her powerful self-defense in the wake of a sexual assault and refusal to accept her corrupt son and lascivious grandson Mukesh transform her into a model dalit woman. Her determination to lead a life of dignity even in the face of disabilities speaks of her bold feminism. Amma's story reminds one of Mulk Raj Anand's Bakha- the untouchable who too has principles and attends to his duties zestfully and also has a sort of dignity unusual of the average scavenger. However Amma's character is more vital and vocal as compared to Bakha's subservient disposition. All of Valmiki's characters are joined to each other for having to undergone the same litany of pain which the narrator presents in an unusual manner by making the Brahmin experience the pain of a dalit when he is misunderstood as a dalit as in the story "Salaam". Self-confidence no longer eludes Valmiki's characters as they are no longer willing to submit meekly before others.

The canvas of Valmiki's stories extends to all aspects of the rising dalit consciousness and the numerous pressures it faces from within and the societal pressures it faces from without. This consciousness is a result of education which is the source of empowerment but also gives rise to problems and conflicts amongst dalits themselves. Some of Valmiki's stories deal with the very pertinent fears of Sanskritised dalits accompanying the revelation of their caste. Stories such as "Fear"," The Storm" and to an extent "Where Can Satish Go?" bear testimony to the terrifying thoughts of dalits arising due to the recognition of their caste by the non-dalits. It seems to the dalit as if he has been caught stealing. Dinesh in the story "Fear" and Sukkur Lal in "The Storm" represent those dalits who are overcome by nervousness and confusion at the mere idea of being revealed exposed. Dinesh turns into a nervous wreck on being overpowered by the illusion of his high caste friend, Ram Prasad Tiwari

spreading the word about his caste. Sukkur Lal's consciousness aroused by his daughter is shocked at the loss of his identity in the self-created superficial world around himself. Having transformed himself into S.lal; his status and honour fail to provide succour to the very "roots" from which he derived nourishment during his days of hardship. He has to bear the agony of being declared rootless and ruthless by his own daughter who wishes to be firmly rooted even in her dirty and inferior past. This reviewer agrees with Shivkumar Mishra's review that the change in Pinki is too abrupt to be taken at face value. The protagonist Satish desires to get rid of his inferiority complex and the ancestral profession of becoming a safai Karamchari but is sadly caught in the mire of his caste. The discovery of his caste leaves him on the road. Thus the social boycott of dalits by non-dalits is as painful and condemnable as is the upwardly mobile dalit's boycott of those below his station and by whose help s\he has risen in life.

The stories add yet another angle to the mental agony of those who have been fortunate enough to get the benefit of reservations. They too are isolated and singled out for vengeance by the non-dalits. In the story "The Web of Intrigue" R.B. is a capable S.C. who is caught up in the web of intrigue woven by his colleagues whose reaction to his forthcoming promotion is "Enough is enough." Promotions based on reservations are an eye-sore in the eyes of non-dalits who give vent to their frustration and jealousy in myriad forms such as backbiting, unpleasant transfers and social boycott of dalits. The story is a clear pointer to the victimization of dalits as a result of caste-prejudices also brought about in the author's autobiography *Joothan*.

Hindu village ceremonies and customs are strongly condemned as illustrated through the three stories in the anthology entitled as "Salaam", "The Hide of an Ox', and "The Killing of a Cow." *Salaam*, the title of an earlier anthology by Valmiki, is a crusade for change in the demeaning traditional practices of Indian villages where a newly married dalit bride or bridegroom had to go and pay obeisance at the doors of the higher castes, begging for clothes and utensils. This practice crushed the confidence and self-respect of the newly married couple right from the start. The story depicts he harsh reality that the hydra-headed monster of caste is difficult to wipe off. The self-confidence achieved by Harish on discontinuing this notorious practice is soon shattered by the words of a young boy who refuses to eat the meat prepared by a Muslim cook. The skill of the narrator lies in presenting casteism embedded in complex social issues. The use of abusive words for people of the sweeper caste by a Brahmin's mother is not only shocking and dehumanizing but an ironical comment upon the so-called wisdom of Brahmanism. The second story is a denunciation of the unpaid job of skinning and carrying away of dead animals from the village. This task reserved only for dalits is not only repulsive and accompanied by abuses but also unremunerative. These unlettered beings wish to ameliorate their lot by aspiring for an education as is manifest in the desire of Bhoore for his son for whom he wants to save a little more money. "The Killing of a Cow" is a strong condemnation of the tradition of sending newly married brides to the Haveli's of Thakurs or the village headmen or else face the terrible consequences. The fate of Sukka is sealed when in an isolated move of self-confidence he refuses to send his wife to the village headman's house. He is framed by the Mukhiya and the sarpanchs in the case of killing a mother cow-a sin for which the sternest punishment must be given according to the Hindu Shastras. Ironically, the Shastras failed to define the status of a human being whose helpless entreaties failed to have any effect on the so called custodians of law and justice.

If Valmiki is critical of the attitude of the upper castes, he is no less unsparing in his criticism of dalits who are frightened to support their own community members as brought about in the story "The Web of Intrigue" where the SCs do not join hands with R.B. in his fight against non-dalits. Equally revealing in the story "Fear" is the provocative attitude of the dalit dwelling in a basti, who is both jealous and scornful of his sanskritised counterpart. The strongest indictment of the untouchables being cruel and heartless towards the lowest in their hierarchy is in "Shavayatra" where the 'Chamars' would not permit the 'Balhars' to even cremate their dead in the same place as their own. If the Balhars- a subcaste of the Valmikis is inhumanly treated by the Chamars, it is as much a cause for indictment by the narrator as the treatment of dalits by the upper-castes. "Shavayatra" reminds one of 'Kafan' by Munshi Prem Chand which highlights the bestiality of the father-son duo belonging to the Chamar community but is equally unsparing in its criticism of a society which is hypocritical and makes a pretence of sympathy. Both the stories are evocative in their indictment of a society held responsible for giving birth to the callousness and inhumane behaviour of the downtrodden towards their brethren. The omniscient narrator in "Shavayatra" expresses through Kalan his rejection of those hollow men who were rhetorical on Ambedkar Jayanti but refused to join the funeral procession of a Balhar child.

An important strand running through most of the stories is the easy vulnerability of dalit women to the upper caste male. Whether it is Sukka's wife in "The

Killing of a Cow" or Amma or Kisni and Mano in "The Homeless" or Birju's wife in "The Beast"; all are regarded as an easy prey on which the vultures of the caste ridden society can pounce upon as a matter of right. Most dalit women except Kisni have a strong sense of their self-respect and dignity and also try to inculcate confidence in their male counter–parts. Amma is the prime example of a woman who would like to free her children from the inferiority complex attached with the broom and canister though she herself cannot leave them if she wants to lead a life of dignity. All dalit women characters in these fifteen stories are no longer silent sufferers but offer resistance in the wake of oppression. Many a time dalit women are caught between the devil and the deep sea as is the case of Birju's wife who has borne the barbaric lust of her maternal uncle since the age of ten and was now being forced to be the victim of another beast in the guise of her father-in-law. The revelation of her firmness and self-confidence in not returning to an earlier hell transforms Jagesar – the exploiter's servant into her saviour. At every precipice there is hope for the dalit woman who is no longer willing to yield to societal pressures and offers resistance at every step.

Amongst the high caste women depicted in Valmiki's stories, some like Kamal's mother and Mrs. Pant are distinct for their strong dislike of the lower castes and use abusive language to give vent to their feelings. Biram's wife is the only example of a woman who bears compassion for the lower classes whereas Mrs. Chopra's help is extended to Amma's family till she keeps her love affair as a secret. The new dimension added to dalit discourse is the help offered to high caste women by dalit men as in "Biram's Bahu" which reminds one of the dalit Velutha falling in love with a high caste woman Ammu in *The God Of Small Things* but is falsely implicated for Ammu's rape and the kidnapping of her children. Biram's bahu deliberately avoids all contact with Ramesar as a result of foreseeing such torture for him. Secondly the crude language spoken by some dalit women reveals their resolve to defend themselves in all their rawness and lack of civility.

The narrator has an eye for the minutest details and the skill of presenting vivid images which emerge out of direct experience of village life. The most striking image is that of a dead cow coming back to life on hearing the helpless shrieks of an innocent dalit charged for the killing of a cow belonging to the Mukhiya. This image discretely pokes fun at the custodians of law and justice of the village specially dressed up to take revenge upon a poor illiterate dalit. No less striking is the image of the Mukhiya as a rakshasa piercing a dalit with his long nails or the image of conductors as wild boars who harden their voice on knowing the passenger's status. In the story Amma, the image of women who have spent their entire life sweeping the streets "—whose decrepit bodies have wilted under the impact of time and like old trees have begun to waste away", is suggestive of dalit women who have been consumed by time, their profession and the back breaking work in their families. The image of Amma's solitary tooth that shook like the maize seeds bobbing up and down in the baking pan of the gram baker is evocative of how dalit women wilt under the pressure of work and numerous constraints. Their desires are as if locked firmly in their discolored trunks that they bring from home.

The stories in the anthology do not have, in the words of Walter Benjamin, "that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis". Rather like the modern short story, there is emphasis on the characters and their psyche, the climax and the denouement or the resolution. Most of the stories begin in the traditional style of storytelling and it is only "The Web of Intrigue" and "Twenty-five Fours Are a Hundred and Fifty" which begin 'in media-res' and travel back to the past. Instead of arriving at a resolution, many of the stories state epigrammatically the blatant truth of the situation- "Where can Satish go?"; "A Chamar village and within it a family of Balhars!" and "Amma's broken down canister and broom mocked at her". Although some of the stories do have ironical endings yet the general tenor of the stories show that the omniscient narrator does not indulge in equivocation but believes in an objective representation of reality in a restrained manner. .

Translation is a daunting task and to translate into English the distinctive flavor of the language used by Valmiki's characters is easier said than done, as it is heavily based on the unlettered rural dialect of western Uttar Pradesh with distinctive lexical, grammatical and phonological features. The pungency contained in the local abuses is difficult to translate. Several words and expressions such as 'abe', 'chuhre ke' and 'lote' have, therefore, been retained

On the whole this translation by Naresh K.Jain has been successful in conveying to a large audience the essence of dalitness and the complex social issues involved. Valmiki's stories are unique in suggesting a concerted dalit/ non-dalit struggle against casteism and also in touching upon universal feelings of jealousy, fear, love, hatred etc. The English translation of these stories has retained much of the elemental force of dalit discourse thereby not losing their essential spirit as captured in the anthology Salaam. Three of the original titles of the stories 'Salaam', 'Amma' and 'Shavayatra' have not been translated in order to foreground demeaning dalit

practices, either imposed by the non-dalits or being the result of untouchability being practiced amongst dalits themselves. The retention of sharp-stinged abuses for the sweepers such as Kanjar, Chuhra, Bhangi and dom and the insults like Saali and Jamadarni being used for women in the English translation speak of the social ostracism of dalits in the Indian society.

The dalit world of Valmiki's stories is a realistic world which has been represented very successfully by the author. The stories are descriptive triumphs of settings, characters and dialogue. The strain of realism succeeds in enlisting the reader's empathy with the spatio-temporal world of dalits without the narrator indulging in any kind of propaganda. This restrained representation is what makes these stories unique.

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Report

Autumn School on The 'Oral' as Resource, 1-14 November 2008 Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

The Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, organized the **Autumn School on The 'Oral' as Resource** from 1st November to 14th November 2008, with a view to foreground the role of orality and oral cultures in production and dissemination of knowledges, and to invite attention of the academics working in the fields of humanities and social sciences to make use of the oral as viable resource. The target audience of the programme was the younger college/ university teachers and researchers who were addressed by the resource persons from various disciplines and institutional affiliations and also by independent scholars and activists.

The inaugural session of the Autumn School was presided over by Prof. Peter Ronald deSouza, the Director of the IIAS. Prof. Satish C. Aikant, the convener of the Autumn School, welcomed the chief guest Gulzar, the eminent poet and filmmaker, and other guests, and in his introduction to the Autumn School, outlined the objectives of the two -week programme. This was followed by the Director's address which dwelt at length on the conception of the idea of the Autumn School and spelled out that the thematic of orality has a special significance as it enables us to recover the symbolic and cultural space, which is so vital to understanding the human condition, something that is espoused as a core value by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. He underlined the fact that India is primarily an oral culture, and orality as a resource, therefore, can be usefully deployed for cultural understanding as well as in production of knowledge in various fields. He expressed his great satisfaction at the response the Autumn School had evoked, and the fact that it was being inaugurated by Gulzar Saab, was a testimony to its significance. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study was adopting the innovative idea of Schools to focus on crucial issues and themes within interdisciplinary perspectives, and the Autumn School is part of that plan.

Gulzar, in his inaugural address, congratulated the organizers of the Autumn School for choosing orality as the focal theme, and stressed the role of the oral in cultures worldwide. Orality, symbolized by sound, had existed when no word existed, and emerged as the primal condition of existence of the universe. Thus sound and the oral were the progenitors of cultures and civilizations. In the beginning there was nothing but the sound and then came the word. Gradually the words got frozen into written texts. But whereas writing became a sign of advancement, it lost the spontaneity and immediacy of the oral. The written, of course, made communication and dissemination of knowledge easier, but the contours of orality were never ever lost. It is the folklore which has a unique capacity to evoke the oral and keep it forever dynamic and contemporary. The forms of the oral may have undergone changes with the advent of new media such as the television and the internet but the oral resonances have always been there.

The inaugural session was followed by academic and interactive sessions addressed by a galaxy of scholars, academics and activists coming from prestigious institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Bhasha Reasearch Centre and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. There were also independent scholars and researchers. The target audience was a group of twenty four participants consisting of younger college/ university teachers and researchers selected from all over the country, thus representing various geographical regions, and coming from diverse fields of humanities and social sciences. The sessions were both academic and interactive which provided not only the theoretical and conceptual inputs but also gave practical guidance to the participants in developing methodological frameworks while making use of the oral as a crucial resource.

Laxman Gaikwad in a keynote address gave the historical background of the de-notified tribes of Gujarat and Maharashtra and described how even with their de-notification the stigma attached to them during the British

times haunts them even today, after sixty years of independence. What the society dubs as criminal about them is actually their compulsive survival strategy. There have been no serious attempts to integrate them into the wider social mainstream. Ironically these nomadic tribes have thrived following their oral traditions, and this is something the society at large and the state need to recognize and value. Gaikwad called upon the academics and social activists to empathise with them and to respond to the challenges of their marginality.

The Autumn School focused on various themes dealing with and discussing various aspects and uses of orality, e.g., myths, legends, ballads, heroic epics, devotional narratives, foiklore, the performative and visual arts, tribal and nomadic voices, women's narratives, oral history and testimonies, partition memoirs, conflict mythology, orality and textuality interface, and orality and the public sphere. Chetan Singh in his talk described how myths have been traditionally used to legitimize power and rule in the Himalayan kingdoms, and talked about the intermingling of the sacred and the secular when gods and goddesses of popular mythology are invoked in human affairs, to intercede on behalf of the petitioners. Kanjibhai Patel referred to the aesthetics of the oral in the western India and how it became a powerful resource in the hands of the nomadic tribes to register their protest against the hegemony of the mainstream culture. Sadhana Naithani spoke about how folklore had been a major element of the international cultural politics since the beginnings of the nineteenth century and how Indian folklore became the most important element in the British colonial cultural politics after 1857, citing examples from the writings of Richard Temple and William Crooke. Even though the Indian subcontinent is one of the richest cultural zones of expressive oral cultures, it is also one of the most backward, in terms of institutions that should study and analyse it, which is why it is important to study and research folklore as a significant form of orality.

Aruna Chakravarti highlighted the role of Baul songs in Bengal that foreground the secular and the spiritual. Transcending the religious and the social boundaries the songs sung by these itinerant minstrels of Bengal conveyed an earthly philosophy with its emphasis on universal affinity, and love and empathy for all creatures, using the expressive power of the oral that strikes a chord in every heart.

Various performative folk art forms have been used in India to exhibit a plural culture, such as the 'Pabuji ka Phad,' which was discussed by Malashri Lal in her lecture-demonstration. Phad, also called a 'movable temple' is an unusual painting on cloth used by itinerant singers to extol the Rajasthan folk hero Pabuji. One needs to relate such oral narratives to cultural interpretation. It is interesting to note that though globalization may make us ignore the purpose of such oral resources, the passion for retelling the stories keeps the folk heroes alive in the imagination of indigenous cultures. Bhagwandas Patel talked about an oral epic, the *Bhili Mahabharata* in which one could see the inversion of characters of the canonical texts to give power and legitimacy to marginalized characters and also to women. These themes were also reflected in Vikram Chaudhari's talk on Adivasi Maukhik Sahitya (the tribals' oral literature)

Gopal Guru made a powerful plea to recognize the potential of 'the oral' since in his view 'the written' had failed us. 'Writing' is hierarchical and elitist in contrast to the 'oral' which is egalitarian and democratic and is an important resource of the subaltern in constructing and asserting his identity. Writing is technology driven and intimidating to the subaltern, whereas the oral is accessible and spontaneous. He also referred to how *Jan Sunwai* had gained popularity in recent times as people were losing faith in the institutional judicial system in India. He followed it up with a talk on 'Drum as a Musical Instrument.' As a musical instrument the drum not only stood for pure orality, it performed aesthetic as well as sociological and political functions, particularly in the hands of the subaltern who could use it to subvert hierarchies and invert meanings invested in traditional power structures. The drum, therefore, has become a resource of empowerment, especially for the dalits and other outcastes. Priyadarshini Vijaisri discussed how ethnography can help in resurrecting the voices of the dalits, something which is only possible within the frameworks of orality.

Partition has been the most traumatic chapter in the history of India which has left deep scars on the psyche of both Hindus and Muslims. Urvashi Butalia in a forceful presentation narrated the testimonies of those who were victimised in the partition violence. In her view history is not only of those who make it but also of those who live it. As she travelled to Pakistan in quest of her own mother's family history, she discovered how a family gets tragically divided. Unfortunately, the testimonies of those who suffered have never been the part of archives or written histories. Nonica Dutta in her talk said that the partition generated several oral testimonies that defy the binary oppositions between the victim and victimizer, witness and survivor, aggressor and spectator, and offered a parallel history of events and non-events, memory and experience. Rowena Robinson recounted the Muslim narratives of violence in the context of Gujarat and Mumbai riots. The suffering of the victims was

intensified because of the humiliation of their knowing that violence was perpetrated not only by outsiders but also by those familiar and intimate. There were also moments of uneasy silences in these narratives. Lianboi Vaiphei talked about the oral narratives among the tribes in Manipur against the Japanese invasion during the Second World War. One of the lesser known facts of the Second World War is the historic battle that was fought by the Allied forces led by the British and the Axis forces of Japan, with Manipur providing the theatrical background of the conclusive battle which led to the end of the Second World War.

Alpana Kishore spoke at length about the history of the conflict in Kashmir and how the folklore there differed from the documented narratives. The oral narratives have special significance in Kashmir where separatist ideologies have not developed a long term vision of the state's future nor any truly coherent image of its past either in literal or in formal discourse. It is the oral narrative that sustains perceptions of these and directs the present. The shifting oral narratives and beliefs in the form of slogans, concepts, versions of history or articulations make up the mythology of the conflict which in turn drives the conflict. Digging into the sources of this mythology therefore assumes a great significance for arriving at possible reconciliation and solution. Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri expanded upon the reciprocal relations between nature and man, which is ubiquitous in the folklore of Kashmir. Jaiwanti Dimri talked about the folklore of Bhutan, making particular reference to Lozey, a popular form of ballad.

Surabhi Sheth in her presentation talked about yet another rich source of oral knowledge, the proverbs, giving examples from the Gujarati folklore. The proverbs not only carried traditional wisdom but are also known for their social comment and subversion. Bhalchandra Nemade spoke about the pre-eminence of orality in relation to the linguistic base called speech which predates language. He spoke at length about linguistic behaviour as it connects with orality. Kanchana Natarajan narrated the experience of a self-realized woman sage who communicated orally the profound philosophy of Advait Vedanta in the language of the folk. Manas Ray used his own life narrative to talk about oral resource, introducing a new concept in oral research - the concept of reciprocal recognition. Archana Verma stressed the importance of the oral in relation to the visual and the performative.

There was also a panel discussion on A. Portell's paper 'What Makes Oral History Different?' The participants acted as discussants and offered sociological and post structuralist interpretations of the paper

In the post-literate world, primary orality is also giving way to a new or secondary orality effecting new media forms. Ravikant Sharma spoke at length about the new mediascape, the digital world and the internet, which basically follow the oral formats. The Internet, while information oriented, is also oral in its focus. The present generation learns and processes information in terms of media such as television, radio, telephone and computer. This is quite evident in the way youngsters are communicating with each other: the SMSes, chats, mailing lists, and blogs are not just changing a language as we have known it, they are also changing the whole mode of remembering and retelling, the characteristic mode of orality. Perhaps the best thing about such orality-based formats and media is that these are cultural unifiers in the modern world.

The participants interacted in a lively and engaged manner with the resource persons and gave their own presentations. The topics included: 'Synchronizing the Oral and the Written'; 'Teyyam and Oral Tradition'; 'Oral History Issues in India'; 'The Use of Oral in Research Methodology'; 'Understanding Gendered Oral Narratives: A Case Study of SPARROW'; 'Kebang: a Three- Tier Panchayati Raj System of 'Adi' tribe of Arunachal Pradesh'; 'Pedagogical Encounter with Orality: Attempting Contemporary History of 'Chavara'; 'Communal Tension buried in Silence in Shimla Hills'; 'Negotiating Placeness: Tribals and Oral Narratives'; 'Folksongs as Cultural Informers: Examples from the Tharu Tribals'; 'Occult practices in Rathwa Tribals of Gujarat'; 'Ritwik Ghatak and the Epic Tradition'; 'The *Ramayana* and Khulia Bhauriya:Oral Tradition in Performing Arts'; 'Folksongs as Cultural Informers: Examples from the Tharu Tribals'; 'Social Aspects of Assamese Proverbs' and 'The Folklore of Saurashtra: Women's Folksongs'.

On the sidelines of the academic sessions there were audio visual presentations of materials relating to the domain of the oral. There were films on the tribals' way of life, oral performers, and on various art forms. Lokesh Khetan and Nikita Desai made an interesting presentation on the Consortium of Tribal Arts, and on the narratives ranging from creation myths from Arunachal Pradesh, Rathwa and Pithora rituals, legends and chronicles, to the stories of the nomads of Rajasthan. Sudheer Gupta showed two films: one on the folk artists of Rajasthan, and the other on a street performers' colony in Delhi. The films, which delineated the dynamic, ever-evolving and contemporary expression of folk artists, provoked a spirited discussion among the audience.

An evening session was devoted to poetry reading by Gulzar. The poet in his inimitable manner recited some

of his new and old poems drawing huge applause from the audience. The Director remarked in appreciation that even the stars and the moon had appeared in the sky to pay their homage to Gulzar Saab's poetry.

The Autumn School concluded on the 14th November. In his valedictory address Prof. Bhalchandra Nemade reiterated the importance of orality in cultural enrichment which was, indeed, brought to focus, through various approaches, by the eminent resource persons through the two-week programme. Prof. Satish C. Aikant thanked the resource persons, the participants as well all those personnel from the various departments of the IIAS who contributed to the success of the programme.

The Autumn School on The Oral as Resource was an endeavour to bring into focus the significant role of orality in relation to textuality, since any understanding of the contemporary culture will necessarily have to take into account the pervasive existence and importance of the oral. Orality places primacy on what might be called functional knowledge rather than a focus on facts. In the context of a multilingual and multivocal country like India where the oral often crosses language boundaries a programme such as the Autumn School helps in overcoming our literate limitations to learn from the practical skills of oral cultures around the world.

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