

thought-provoking. And the style of Satya Brata's thinking holds a lot of "promise". If only he could think through the lens of his own tradition and his own lived reality, of post-colonial India! A book on Time would be more timely if it told us of the Space that the author authentically lives in. But I am hopeful. I have learned from this book that to think is to thank. Seriously, that is a very fertile teaser of an insight. One has to be thankful for that.

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Lakshmi Kannan, *Nandanvan & Other Stories*, Translated from the original Tamil by the author, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011, Pp. 280 +x, ₹ 325.

One of the joys of reading short stories in a collection is that one can linger on each story without feeling compelled to go forward, anxiously clutching the threads of the narrative. Lakshmi Kanan's collection of short stories has the similar quality of making the reader ruminate and sense the resonance as each of the stories in some way or the other connects with the life experiences of the reader. Whether, it be the everyday struggle with the mundane and tyranny of a workplace in the "Zeroing In" and "The Maze" or transacting internally with world of emotions while swinging between life and death in "Please, Dear God" and "A Sky All Around", grappling with loneliness and filial indifference in old age in "Nandanvan" and "Savvyasachi Square" and finally, negotiating with patriarchy that forms the dominant theme in this collection, these stories immediately forge a relationship with the readers giving them an easy access into the inner world of the text.

The anthology is divided into three parts. The first part is a detailed analysis of Lakshmi Kanan's literary style and her stories by C.T. Indra, followed by two sets of interviews with the author by Christine Gomez and Sudha Rai respectively, giving a useful insight into the worldview and the literary style of the author. The second part comprises sixteen short stories followed by a novella in the third part. Originally written in Tamil and translated into English by the author herself, most of the stories despite being situated within the South Indian context, have a universal appeal with an eclectic literary style that transcends all regional and linguistic boundaries. In fact, one of the merits of this collection lies in the ways in which the author has negotiated not only with the bilinguality of the text, but has also deftly transposed the cultural traditions. This is a mark of an

excellent translation where the culture and the language that expresses it, blend effortlessly, transporting the reader to the world of the narrative. While replying to the question posed by Sudha Rai, Lakshmi Kanan aptly stated, "The mediations I negotiate are mostly in the use of language as I am anxious that the translation should read well... that it has to flow without disturbing the laws of English grammar, syntax... The real challenge is in translating the dialogue and grasping the speech rhythms of a people" (31).

One of the striking qualities of the stories is the complex treatment of the themes. This is best articulated in the narratives on gender with multiple voices creating a whirlwind of tensions and conflicts accentuating the intensity of these short stories. Thus we are confronted with a situation in which feminism is not a simplistic linear idea. Rather it is a complex discourse woven with the broader frames of religious orthodoxies, class structure, postcolonial identities, women's compliance with the patriarchy and most significantly their quiet subversion and negotiation instead of outright rejection. For instance, "Ejamanaaar" (meaning husband in Kannada) is one such story in which the protagonist, Gowri, an old lady operates within the traditional patriarchal family controlling the financial as well as household matters with the husband usually occupying the interior portion of the house, probably symbolic of his withdrawal from the practical life. Gowri's position of authority is further enhanced in her portrayal as the confidante of the neighbourhood and the silent yet palpable chemistry that she shares with one of the relatives, Sambasivan indicates a certain sexual autonomy that Gowri quietly enjoys. There is a pun in the term *ejamanaaar* as the tone of the narrative points out that the actual *ejamanaaar*, which also implies a manager, is Gowri. In many ways, the tradition dominated by power and hierarchy between the husband and wife here is reduced to an empty symbol, mocked at by none other than Gowri herself when she says, "... there is a world beyond this very imperfect character called an 'ejamanaar'Ö" (63). In contrast to this are the outright rejection of the oppressive traditions and a firm denunciation of the patriarchal structure in "Muniyakka" and "Because... ." However, this denunciation is accompanied by adherence to the same traditions generating a tension that creates several layers of negotiation. Such a nuanced approach is adopted in "Nagapushpam" in which the constant struggle between the mother and her questioning daughter is resolved by the author herself in her insightful commentary on women as lynchpin of the traditions, carrying the burden of meticulous adherence to them.

Interestingly, in these stories the class differences are

the basis of the attitudinal differences too. The characters belonging to the middle class are usually reticent in challenging the traditions. The questioning and the tentativeness of the protest are mediated in most of the stories through the character of the girl child belonging to the middle class background. On the other hand, this conservative middle class attitude is countered by strident opposition of the women belonging to the marginalized sections of the society as reflected in the two stories, in which the female rebels have the same name, Muniyakka. The mythological tropes are used by the author to underscore some startling analogies between the sufferings of women situated in different time and space. The disconcerting questions asked by the girl child in "Because..." not only represent an alternate reading of the *Ramayana*, they also attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the tradition endorsed by the epic, creating a tumult in the comfort zone of the cherished conventions. Even the modern ideals are not spared. The discourse of feminism is questioned in "Simone de Beauvoir And The Mane". Beauvoir with her writings as an iconic feminist is deconstructed in the story by juxtaposing her unconventional personal relationship with Jean Paul Sartre with that of the contemporary urban educated Indian woman who feels stifled by the modern man's expectations of her as an intellectual embodiment of Beauvoir and her unconventionality on one hand, but a submissive partner on the other. Through the protagonist, the writer highlights this dilemma in the feminist legacy of Beauvoir that also tries to grapple with the mismatch in Beauvoir's unflinching devotion to Sartre despite his infidelity in a truly conventional mould with her avant-garde writings, like *The Second Sex* that have been the inspiration of the feminist movements. Ultimately, the modern Indian woman charts her own feminist trajectory in "Simone de Beauvoir And The Mane," the recurrence of which we find in the novella, *Another Hour, Another Hue*. Interestingly, the feminine of the word *novello*, this novella deals with the sexual politics that working women confront in their workplaces, especially in an intellectually liberated university environment, where gender hierarchies are supposed to be minimal. In fact, the duplicity of the modern man is highlighted, who on one hand wants a modern woman and on the other hand, resents her self confidence and independence. Whether it is in "Just Think About It", "Maria" or "Another Hour, Another Hue," the narratives expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal behaviour that is recast in the modern assertion of the traditional sexual power and sexist attitudes. The bruised male ego in "Just Think About It," in which the man is unable to take the rejection by his wife, ignoring his own instrumentality

in it, the insensitivity of the male attitude that mocks at female homosexuality while glorifying the male homosexual behaviour in "Maria" and the oppressive sexual assertion of a superior who manipulates the careers of his women co-workers reducing them to helplessness, though not for very long in "Another Hour, Another Hue" tell us that gender equality in our society has a long way to go.

The trials and tribulations of a workplace are brought out sensitively in "The Maze" and "Zeroing In" that highlight the stressful professional situations in which mediocrity manipulates and marginalizes excellence and loyalty is given precedence over merit. The frustrations, helplessness and dejection experienced by the protagonists are easily identifiable by readers irrespective of gender. The documentation of real life experiences into sensitive narratives in the stories point to the existential predicament resulting from continuous oscillation between traditions and modernity. Caught between the two ends, the characters struggle to grapple with the sense of self and preserve their individual identities, something that dominates the real life experiences. The stories dealing with life and death are surrealistic giving an even pace to the narratives making a reader to introspect about the questions of life.

Clearly there is a distinct literary style within which the stories are grounded that makes Kanan a part of the distinctive genre of postcolonial Indian writers. Theorizing this style of Indian writers, especially of those who write in English as well as other regional languages, becomes important. Bracketing Kanan's works as 'Gothic' or 'Marxist' as analysed by C.T. Indra and Christine Gomez in the first part limits the spirit of the text, imposing categories that may not be inappropriate.

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Rajee Seth, *Not Without Reason and Other Stories* Trans. Raji Narsimhan, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, Pp.119, ₹ 210.

This collection of short stories entitled *Not Without Reason and Other Stories* comprises of nine stories by well known Hindi writer Rajee Seth translated into English by none other than Raji Narsimhan whose English translation of Maitreyi Pushpa's Hindi novel *Alma Kabutari* was shortlisted for the Crossword Translation award in 2006-7. As the translator has aptly remarked in the Introduction to this collection of short stories, that to call Rajee Seth a