

and in particular for those interested in historical developments in South Asia. A number of sources have been provided in Urdu bringing to light details of Azad's political career dispelling several myths and ascribing Maulana Azad his rightful place in history.

NOTES

1. A.G. Noorani, 'Horrors of Partition' in *Frontline*, 9 March 2012, p.73.
2. Shabi Ahmad, 'The Making of a Nationalist Muslim: A Study of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Foundation of his Political Views' in Mahavir Singh (ed.), *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Profile of a Nationalist*, Kolkata: MAKAIAS, 2003, p. 90.

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Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation, edited by Sankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya. Hyderabad/Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp.180.

Alongside the slogans proclaiming 'shining India,' 'incredible India' and the like, there exists an India that defies these adjectives. A large chunk of India living under the flyovers of our glittering metropolises or in ghettos or along the railway lines or in *bastis* in villages is what we tend not to take note of. However, those who live on the margins have finally found their voice and call for our attention. And once we hear them, we are bound to realize that their legitimate cry cannot be questioned; they may express themselves bitterly or mildly, with a whimper or with a roar, with rage or with anguish but they *do* have the potential to make us aware. This writing coming from the oppressed sections of the society has made its presence felt in a way which no academician or litterateur can afford to ignore. The book under review *Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation* contains short stories providing "a wide spectrum of issues and concerns that dalit people encounter in contemporary social interactions," to quote the editors.

The eighteen stories that make the anthology come from divergent sections of the dalit society of Bengal – small cultivators, fishermen, landless farmers, women, the untouchables and their sub-castes, the nomads and the Hindu migrants from Bangladesh. These are the

voices of dissent and resistance coming from those living on the edge. The word dalit here does not refer only to those listed under Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes; it has been used in its broader sense to include all those who are 'crushed' or 'ground'; all those who are culturally marginalized, economically exploited and politically oppressed.

The beauty and appeal of fiction lies in the fact that it does not "tell", rather it recreates. Recreation goes straight into the heart and has the force to evoke empathy. The pain and struggle of the oppressed that we but vaguely understand and sympathise with become real as we read these tales of suffering, hopelessness and dejection and occasional revolt. When little Munnali, the eleven year old protagonist of the story 'Munnali' flops down like "a broken basket, neglected and discarded," because she is not acceptable in the kitchen of the "bhadrak", the upper caste people, we are left with a queasy feeling: "how can we help her and the likes of her for whom all doors are closed because of the disadvantages of the caste they are born into?" But read on, and Maunnali's trouble would appear minor as compared to what we encounter – myriads of more burning problems, more negations and more harrowing experiences as in the story 'The Other Jew'. Yet these unfortunate ones are broken but not defeated; they have the guts to survive and fight; they are resilient only to bounce back and defy the system as in 'On Firm Ground'. Like Edwin Markham — of 'The Man with the Hoe' fame— the dalit writers seem to ask: what will happen to the future when "this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world/After the silence of centuries?"

Each story offers a different spectrum of experience; each story recreates a world of emotions in their varied forms: fear, anger, pity, compassion, affection, fellow feeling and despair; in each story the human interaction takes place in wide-ranging locations; and each story provides valuable insights into human nature and the dalit consciousness. In the process the customs, attitudes and activities of the people get illuminated sometimes leaving us with bewildering questions. In 'Reincarnation of Parashuram', for example, the author Anil Gharai shows the ignorance and superstitious mind-set of a tribal family who fall in the trap of a witch-doctor (the Gunin). At his behest, the son chops his old and ailing mother to death believing her to be a witch who is out to devour his infant son. Unfortunately, these people cannot see the obvious that the child was suffering from malnutrition. Though the title of the story is a pointer towards the mainstream power structure and the need to resist it, the message is clear: it is the lack of education that is

responsible for their troubles from which they need to be wrenched out.

If Gobind Shoundo's 'On Water and on Shore' narrates the story of an unfortunate fisherman's struggle to survive on the turbulent waters of the sea that has devoured his son, Makhanlal Pradhan's story 'Farmer Gopal's Caste and Creed' shows the game our politicians and land sharks play to lure the farmers out of their land with lofty promises only to leave them in the lurch. Gopal is made to sell his land and is ultimately reduced to becoming a bonded labour. While high-rise buildings may emerge on what were once the dancing paddy fields, as symbols of development, the poor hapless farmers like Gopal would be forced to swallow their self-esteem to keep the hearth burning. Stories such as these pose a big question mark on the lop-sided concepts of development.

'Bazaar' on the one hand can be read as the frantic efforts of an anxious wife to divert her husband's attention from the *haat* (the area of prostitutes); on the other it can be read as a sad commentary on the fate of tender tribal girls who are engaged apparently as servants but are made to satisfy the lust of their middle-aged masters. Here, the connivance of the wife is hard to condone. 'Footprints of an Elephant' and 'Survival' are narratives of survival: the former depicts the struggle of an old man to cope with human deceit and the latter, the fierce fight with death as the protagonist tries to scoop out grain from the snake-pit.

The authors coming from different parts of Bengal and

different ethnic groups offer a kaleidoscopic view of their societies. Besides poverty and suffering their other themes are: the changing times; the onslaught of urban culture on rural society; the tribal ethos disappearing because of the intrusion of politics; the greed of the rich; the indignities of caste-system and also in-fights within the dalit sub-castes. The stories are insightful and eloquent. The translation is evocative and succeeds in capturing the rhythm and spirit of the native Bengali/dalit idiom. At no point of time does one feel uncomfortable with the language.

The 'Foreword' and 'Preface' succinctly comment on dalit literature and the need for translations such as these. 'Introduction' is exhaustive and useful. Sankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya provide a brief survey of the Bangla dalit writings and the scope and concerns of translation of dalit literature. The Glossary appended to some of the stories makes the reading more informed and lucid while notes on authors and translators are valuable additions for an academician. It is ironic, however, that no dalit female writer gets representation in the anthology. On the whole, *Survival and Other Stories* provides an eye-opening read and I have no reservations in recommending it to prospective readers.

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KASHMIR'S NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT

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The book reflects upon, delves into and contests the idea of 'Kashmiriyat'. It seeks to find the ambiguity regarding Kashmiri identity and explore how ordinary Kashmiris negotiate spaces in their lives—political, regional and religious—particularly since Kashmir became a disputed territory and a conflict zone. The aim is to get a grip on whether normal day-to-day reporting, literary writings and cinematic productions carry with them an understated or underlying sense of betrayal or injustice, anger or simple ill-will or prejudices; and, how all these permeate into the region's conscience unknowingly.

Manisha Gangahar has done her doctorate from Panjab University, Chandigarh. Her area of specialization is postcolonial studies. She has worked with Hindustan Times, written review articles for national dailies, and published papers in national and international journals. She was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, from 2011 to 2013. At present she is Assistant Professor of English at SD College, Chandigarh.

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