

Book Reviews

These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone by Temsula Ao, New Delhi: Zubban and Penguin India, pp. 147, Rs. 195.

'Home is where the heart is', goes the old saying. 'Home' is a powerful trope in the literary imagination of any land. The very utterance of the word 'home' invokes memories coiled in nostalgia, and such other feelings that at a personal level often remain unsaid but deeply felt. Narratives on/about 'home' make available resources for reconstructing the history of a person or a community. In the 19th century American literary imaginary, the 'home' has always been the soul's domain, symbolically a spiritual one, physically located on top of a hill. Temsula Ao has a different and sensitive take on the idea of 'home'. In her stories, she captures the thematics of the 'home' not on the memory of its ensnaring comfort, security and sweetness or as a spiritual domain, but on its pain, trauma and tragedy. The title is catchy and captivating as it resonates through the political crucible of the Naga autonomy struggle in the 1960s. During this period, what happened to the people of the Naga Hills caught in the crossfire of the state machinery unleashing its power to 'discipline the deviant' and the resistance forces (the ethnic militia) fighting for freedom imbued with overflowing patriotism, is the focus of these tales. The ten stories that make the volume take us back to the 1960s and poignantly capture the times and events of those agonizing years, full of pain, equally painful to be remembered.

With four collections of poetry and a volume on *Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* to her credit, Ao's creative journey as a short story writer is marked by her sensitive portrayal of events of 'those bloody years' that encapsulates the pain of 'home'. The epigraph at the beginning of the collection tellingly sets the tone of the stories as the author calls upon the dead to awaken and 'teach the living how not to die'.

Violence that ravished the Naga Hills in the wake of the insurgency not only took a complex form but also became a spiralling force that engulfed and affected individuals and entire communities deeply. People lost their home and hearth, near and dear ones were brutalized, and without choice, some were compelled to join the underground. In revisiting those early years of Naga conflict, the author sanitizes us by telling what

actually happened and sensitizes us about the human tragedy that has been often forgotten. Ao's encounter with the past of her people is not one of derision towards those who perpetrated the pain. With grace and fortitude she affirms her authorial position in stating: 'What the stories are trying to say is that in such conflicts, there are no winners, only victims'. (x) The human cost of such a conflict is enormous as it leaves behind 'survivors scarred both in mind and soul'. (x)

The conflict has created a historical niche and provided for the author a narrative trajectory. In the story 'An Old Man Remembers', Ao underlines the historical context of her narrative articulation that those who are from the other side of this history need to know what happened to those who fought for a homeland for the Nagas and the price they paid. Remembering his friend Imli's words, grandfather Sashi says: 'The young had a right to know about the people's history and that they should not grow up ignorant about the unspeakable atrocities that they, the older generation has witnessed.' (93) Ao's task as a storyteller and historian of her community therefore is well deserved. One may suspect the historian-storyteller's role on the count of authenticity, but that suspicion is dispelled, as the author has been a witness to those days of tragedy and trauma. A reading through these stories makes some of the characters very identifiable, if one were to revisit the collective memory of those years.

The author shuns subjective indulgence and is circumspective in narrating these stories soaked in realistic detail. If the Indian army, in most cases, used raw force and was ruthless, the underground outfit was not free from atrocities on its own people either. In spite of the discipline, the members of the underground were also vulnerable to human weaknesses such as jealousy, hatred and greed. On both sides we have manipulators as well as dreamers. What make these stories highly readable are not the atrocities per se and the resistances to those but the humanness that finally triumphs over disruption of life. In the midst of mayhem and destruction, life holds on trying to find meaning and purpose in altered situations.

Conflicts of all kinds throw up heroes and villains, creating new community lores and legends, jokes and stories. Except 'The Night', 'The Pot Maker' and 'The Journey', rest of the stories deal with the Naga insurgency and its consequences. Stories such as 'The Jungle Major',

'The Curfew Man' and 'An Old Man Remembers' throw light on different shades of the conflict and how ordinary people dealt with extraordinary situations. 'The Last Song' is a gory tale, for Apenyo, the young singer and her mother were raped and killed by the young army captain and his men in an orgy of violence and mayhem. The story 'Shadows' matches 'The Last Song' in its gory detail in which Hoito, an underground commander in his way to China kills Imli, the innocent young recruit because he hates him for being forced on the group as the son of the second in command of the underground army. Ao makes a point that unethical and inhuman acts would always invite retributive justice. Both Hoito and the army captain became insane while Hoito had a terrible death; the army captain was paying for his crime in a mental hospital somewhere. The last story 'A New Chapter' is about the new power structure that has emerged in Nagaland as part of the democratized process. The author takes a look at the creation of a new class called contractors and suppliers who ultimately become the members of the political elite. If the over ground politics is about manipulation and vested interest, the underground is no exception; both structures in a way complement each other as mirror images.

Besides the stories on/about insurgency and its consequences that have changed life as never before in Naga Hills, Ao is equally concerned about women in three of her stories in the volume. 'The Journey' is a story that captures the struggle of a young woman for her education and the adolescent dream of falling in love. Similarly 'The Pot Maker' is a story about a traditional craft and a young girl's determination to be a pot maker in spite of her mother's resistance. In the death of the mother we see the birth of a new pot maker. 'The Night' is a story of betrayal and clearly underlines patriarchal domination in Naga society. The story searchingly asks the question: Why is it always the lot of women to be at the receiving end in any act of moral transgression? In Imnala we may see the emergence of a new woman who in spite of being an unwed mother is determined to bring up her two children with her own effort in that education is a vector as she decides to complete her high school and be independent. These stories are more than just stories as they inform us about the Ao-Naga clan structure, clan hierarchy, the status of women in the society and about social institutions. The conflict between tradition and change is very obvious in these stories. One gets the feeling that Ao is not for change at the cost of tradition but for a tradition that readjusts to the changing times.

These stories conjure up a host of themes and issues in a narrative form that is realistic and linear. Ao, it seems, is gifted with the felicity of language and in her use of language she conveys a clear message that simplicity has

immense power. The stories are gripping as they are told with honesty and without pretension. Narrative lucidity coupled with probity adds to that gripping power. As no one is sure when the Naga conflict will end, collection of stories, as the one under review, offers to both Naga and outside readers a peep into the past and invites the readers to be part of the author's *vision* couched in traditional wisdom; 'that extolled the virtue of human beings living at peace with themselves and in harmony with nature and with our neighbours.' (xi) She invites her community to 're-embrace and re-write this vision into the fabric of their lives' (xi), that they should learn from the past and prepare for the future. Ao's volume is the beginning of more volumes to come out from Nagaland. She deserves the accolade for having written such excellent stories. Although there are a few typos that could have been taken care of, the volume is well produced. Finally, I would like to say that the book under review deserves a place in every sensitive reader's book self.

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The Indian Imagination of Jayanta Mahapatra, (eds.) Jaydeep Sarangi and Gauri Shankar Jha, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006, xii + 193 pp., ISBN: 61-7625-622-6.

'Poetry makes nothing happen', W H Auden once said famously. Despite that influential axiom from a nonetheless socially and politically engaged poet, the poetry of commitment remains alive, in India and elsewhere, and one of its primary living exponents in the subcontinent is Jayanta Mahapatra, to whose work this new volume is dedicated. Mahapatra, born in 1928 and hailing from a Christian background in Orissa, occupies a special place in the canon of Indian poetry in English, having lived in India all his life and hence remaining outside the resident versus expatriate debate, and (as of recent years) writing both in English and in his native Oriya, thus straddling the English versus Indian languages divide. The present volume, edited by Dr Jaydeep Sarangi of Vidyasagar University (Midnapore, West Bengal) and Dr Gauri Shankar Jha (Indira Gandhi Government College, Tezu, Arunachal Pradesh), brings together a multiplicity of perspectives on one of India's foremost contemporary poets.

The volume consists of 18 pieces, individual or joint, by a total of 20 contributors, all Indians and India-residents. Of these, one is a tribute poem, one an interview

(conducted by Jaydeep Sarangi) with the poet himself, another a study of Mahapatra's English-language short stories and another a discussion of his Oriya poetry. The remaining 14, focus on his poetic production in English: here we may note that while Mahapatra views himself as an Oriya poet writing primarily, though not exclusively in English, he has no qualms about the use of the English language in India, declaring in the interview with Sarangi: 'The English we use when we move around our huge country [is] the one language we can communicate with', and: 'Children are more at home in English nowadays. And with inter-state marriages on the increase, English is used in homes more and more'. (pp. 189-190) Clearly, the poet does not view writing in English as an obstacle to the expression of Indianness.

Jayanta Mahapatra is beyond doubt an eloquent poet of the human and natural worlds, but the aspect of his work primarily focused on in this collection is his role as a denunciatory bard of the history of India and Orissa—history being understood as a procession of events that includes and determines the present. For the poet, Orissa is 'the land...where the wind keens over the grief of the river Daya and where the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Kanark'. (quoted 145) These words point up his identification with both—the dense cultural heritage and the day-to-day suffering of his region of India. Indeed, a keynote of this volume is Mahapatra's dark yet complex vision of history, viewed, in terms that might recall Walter Benjamin, as a chain of oppressive events, if not catastrophes, whose spoils need urgently to be reclaimed by the victims from the smilingly triumphant victors. It would be an oversimplification to call Mahapatra's a postcolonial perspective on history, for, as many of the book's contributors show, his vision of oppression sweeps in the pre and post Raj periods too. If today's India is seen as a 'puppet land' where the age-old subjection of women and the poor continues as ever, the supposedly heroic Indian past also receives short shrift. In his poem 'Dhaulagiri' (from *Waiting*, 1979), he denounces the massacre of the inhabitants of Kalinga, in Orissa, perpetrated under Ashoka, the emperor generally perceived as India's great benefactor and 'uniter', declaring: 'Memory has drained us/and an ancient stone wall/inscribed with rules/is not what it appears./Someone's rotten blood has gotten into the stone'. Here, the contributors Syamala Kallury and Anjana M Dev comment: 'For Mahapatra, the Ashokan edicts are a constant reminder of the suffering that preceded their construction'. (37) The poet thus raises his voice articulating an alternative discourse to the chorus of the victors, even declaring, in the volume *Random Descent* (2005): 'The land some love to call holy/ is not the one I want to live in', condemning the famous Orissa of the

temples, of Puri and Konarak, in near-apocalyptic terms that, as T Sai Chandra Mouli puts it in this volume, reflect his 'shock and revulsion at the ghastly happenings around' (p. 154). this in an India whose catastrophic history, far removed from the 'shining India' of call-centres and gleaming IT campuses, stretches from Kalinga through the colonial period to the Bhopal disaster and the wholesale betrayal of Gandhian principles once held dear.

This specific Indianness of Mahapatra's core concerns is highlighted repeatedly by the contributors. Nonetheless, it is to be noted, in literary terms as such that where intertextuality comes into play, the vast majority of the comparisons invoked are with poets not from the Indian but the British/Irish/American tradition. The *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, or contemporary Indian English poets such as Nissim Ezekiel or AK Ramanujan may get a brief look-in, but the main comparative thrust, even from those scholars taking a firm anti-colonial line, aligns Mahapatra with such poets as T S Eliot, W B Yeats or Seamus Heaney, and, notably, the Romantics, Blake, Keats, and, more than anyone else, William Wordsworth, champion of the common rural folk and listener to 'the still, sad music of humanity'. These comparisons, the Wordsworthian one above all, are indubitably valid, but it could nevertheless be asked whether a volume dedicated to the 'Indian imagination' of Jayanta Mahapatra might not usefully have paid a shade more attention to what links him to writers, past and present, from his own subcontinent.

This said, the passion and commitment with which the various scholars approach Mahapatra's multifaceted production are at no moment in doubt. The overall feel of the volume—and hence, of the poet's imaginative world itself—may be summed up in this formulation by the contributor Kasthuri Bai: 'Words in Mahapatra's poetry are often endowed with associative force as much as that of a stone dropped into a still pool of water causing ripples of water from the centre into which the stone fell'. (p 120) Strong with this 'associative force', Mahapatra's poetry remains, according to his own conception, a work-in-progress of social and spiritual criticism, by definition never-ending and unfinished: as he declares in *Random Descent*, 'I only want to renew myself'. (p. 172) This poetic process of self-renewal will, beyond all doubt, be enhanced and furthered through the Indian criticism of Mahapatra's ongoing work, as exemplified in this commendably open-ended and multidimensional introduction to the poet's achievement so far.

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New Concerns: Voices in Indian Writing, ed. by Sushma Arya and Shalini Sikka, New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2006, pp. 210. Rs. 430.

Language, observed a scholar at a Seminar at the IAS, 'is like a river'—ever fresh and flowing, never stagnate. The same analogy could be applied to literature. Its intrinsic characteristic is to flow and explore; engage in search; raise issues; and address new concerns. It is not for literature to solve problems but to state them suitably. In that, it evolves a kind of self critique. This notion of self critique of literature is central to the book under review—*New Concerns: Voices in Indian Writing*—both with regard to its title and the selection of essays. Published by Macmillan India, *New Concerns* is a collection of sixteen papers by senior scholars of repute like Meenakshi Mukherjee, Jasbir Jain, Malashri Lal, R W Desai as also by upcoming young scholars. The papers provide a wide spectrum and show both the range and the quality of the achievement of Indian writing in English and its limitations.

The march of Indian literature in English from preparation to experiment and then on to innovative measures has been steady. Though some early detractors dubbed it as 'not belonging to the soil', stalwarts like C D Narsimhaiah, K R S Iyengar and a few others gauged its potential. This literature has been rich in themes but in its early years it lacked technical finesse. This was pointed out by H C Harrex who listed dozens of themes that Indian fiction was exploring but regretted that technically it was neither experimental nor elegant.

Meenakshi Mukherjee tackles some of these issues subtly in her paper, 'Indian Novels in English: Then and Now'. As a keynote address, the paper presents the argument in simple and effective language. Without overtly glorifying Indian writing or criticizing it for its limitations, she reviews the writings of the earlier writers and the post-1980s writers, thus setting the stage for further discussion. Mukherjee makes a fine distinction between 'then' writers and 'now' writers. For the former, 'Indianness' meant a kind of 'inertia and good humored tolerance', for the latter it means a more frank assertion of Indian idiom both with regard to linguistic and stylistic devices and techniques. The new wave writers show a kind of self confidence with technique and use of language, and keenness to take thematic liberties. Mukherjee feels that while good literature is coming out in regional languages it is the literature written in English that has an advantage over others. 'If Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy did not get the Booker, and Jhumpa Lahiri did not get the Pulitzer Prize they would not have been known outside small literary circles.' (We may now add Kiran Desai also)

From the first essay I shift my attention to the last one 'Some Approaches to Teaching Course in Indian Writing in English' by Pushpinder Syal as it deals with the actual problem of classroom teaching of the prescribed texts and the critical responses they generate. Taking out some extracts from Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchables*, Amit Chaudhari's *A Strange and Sublime Address*, and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*; she illustrates how the lexical choices and semantic markers lead the readers to read a text from the convention of colonial portrayal. The discourse of Indian writing in English, Pushpinder asserts 'is repetitive of the English literary tradition' and feels that it is high time our writers project an India that is really India. I am reminded of Yasmin Gooneratne's observation that the true strength of Indian writing is perceived when writers confront their inheritance boldly and accept its complexity.

An anthology without a paper on women's writing may seem incomplete in the present context and this gap is filled by Santosh Gupta's 'Fashioning the Narrative: Indo-English Novels by Women Writer's'. This paper offers a quick survey of women's writing. Gupta makes two points: one that Indian women writers are exploring social situations where women can attain distinctive identity without demolishing the family and, second that Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai leave their novels mainly 'inconclusive'. As regards the first, it may be pointed out that all women novelists are not avoiding a 'break-off'; there are umpteen examples where break is deliberate; it is appreciated and upheld, flouting familial and social values. Similarly, I tend to agree with Shalini Sikka's observation that Shashi Deshpande advocates a search for the real self. While Anita Desai's characters lose touch with their inner being and march towards neurosis, Shashi Deshpande finds ways and means to keep her heroines in touch with the inner core.

There are six essays on individual novelists. P. Geetha studies the creative use of stories in Geeta Hariharan's novels. Malashri Lal's paper 'Bharati Mukherjee: The Maximalist Credo' is a reprint of the paper originally published in her *The Law of the Threshold*. Interestingly, Bharati Mukherjee draws another critic, R W Desai who clubs her with Jhumpa Lahiri and sees how both are bogged down by the post-colonial expatriate psychology which makes their writing stereotype. Only if they could leave this 'baggage' behind, they would be far more readable and successful. Usually, Salman Rushdie attracts attention for his magic realism, treatment of history and technique but here is a lively piece by Garima Gupta on popular culture in his writing.

A refreshing paper—the only one on drama—is by Jasbir Jain, 'Two Authors in Search of an Audience: Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani'. As an astute critic, Jain

leads the reader step by step from the Indian theatre's strength to its search for reality and then on to its present anxieties and universal concerns. She gives a brief but convincing analysis of Karnad's plays *vis-à-vis* Mahesh Dattani's and observes that though both the playwrights address contemporary issues, Karnad provides a deeper insight into the cultural past of the country and its present discord. 'Karnad by moving into the annals of history explores the dissensions within one religious community, the real issues being power and material gain, not belief.' Both these writers, though journeying on separate routes advocate change in the mind-set and 'as such touch upon the universal concerns.'

Two critical pieces on Indian English poetry, one on Indian short story, a short story by Laxmi Kannan and an insightful 'Introduction' by Shalini Sikka make the anthology almost all-inclusive. I say 'almost' because somehow non-fiction prose/non-fiction fiction, which has made (and is making) a significant contribution to Indian writing in English is missing from the anthology. Indian short story is represented by Bhim S Dahiya's paper entitled 'The Modern Indian Short Story in English'. Dahiya has selected seven stories for analysis. Studying these stories at the level of language and narrative technique, he appreciates the efficient craftsmanship of the writers. Yet, he puts across a viable point—though the short story is able to evoke Indian ethos, one misses the touch of the spoken idiom of the common man when the language is English and not vernacular. The short story itself is represented by Laxmi Kannan's 'The Rangoli Woman'. R W Desai's short stories contained his collection *Of War and War's Alarm* and his novel *Frailty, Thy Name is Woman* are taken up for feminist discussion by Shalini Sikka.

A significant feature of this anthology is the inclusion of discussion on a travelogue and a paper dealing with the Anglo-Indian child. Usually these are neglected fields, unless suggested specifically as themes for some seminar. Kumkum Yadav explores a woman traveller's travails and experiences in the male-oriented field of mountaineering in, 'Mountaineer, Writer and Woman; Christina Nobel's *At Home in the Himalayas*'. Neelima Luthra peeps through Ruskin Bond's child characters. Shalini Sikka's 'Introduction' is discerning. It is not a general survey of the papers, instead it is interspersed with comments and discussion wherever necessary.

At a time when it has become fashionable to bring out anthologies with tedious and specious papers, the present book is class apart. The essays make scholarly reading and probe new and diverse fields. I wish I could say that it is 'simply flawless': there are a few punctuation and

spelling errors that have gone undetected. Otherwise the production is of high quality with pleasing cover-design commensurate with the theme of the book. That Indian writing in English has immense possibilities is vouchsafed by works such as these.

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Tradition and Terrain: Aesthetic Continuities by S Murli, Usha, V T, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2006, Rs. 500.

The book under review is fascinating on many a reason. It contains two essays on the aesthetic philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, one critique exclusively on *The Future Poetry*. This is especially to be commended, for the critics of the present generation appear to ignore Sri Aurobindo as if he did never exist, and his canons of criticism did not deserve a hearing. Another valuable piece in the collection is on Andal's psychology of *bhakti* discussed in the context of poetic discourse. With the emergence of environmental consciousness, our critics have two pieces, one on *ecopoetics* and of Ted Hughes and another on environmental aesthetics, accompanied by the piece on ecological wisdom. As every reviewer does, so this reviewer too has mentioned his preferences in the opening part of the review, and that in general mood of commendation.

The writers make it plain that they have intended to map an 'aesthetic of wonder'. It is an engaging phrase, and wonder, it should be noted, has not only been the mother of metaphysics as it was Aristotle, is also the winged horse for poetry to ride on. Rabindranath Tagore is a poet whom the sense of wonder never deserted, and his later poems bear ample testimony to that. Not the inner and infinite alone, but the 'meanest flower that blows' can and does move the poet's mind as well. Of course, our authors have *adbhuta rasa* in mind when they speak of wonder. I am sure if *adbhuta* could be rendered by *wonder*. In the commentary on Jaideva's *Dasavatara Stotra*, the *vamana* is referred to as embodying *adbhuta rasa*. It appears that *ascarya* or *vismaya* could have been more promising candidates for capturing the sense of wonder that Aristotle speaks of. However, this is a terminological matter, though by no means a trivial affair, for much depends on the employment of words in the context of poetry and the discourse about it. The word *ascarya* in the sense admiring puzzlement occurs in *Kathopanishad* and the *Bhagavatagita*. The word has more

metaphysical connotation in the matter of one's encountering Reality than *adbhuta*. When our authors quote Jayanta Mahapatra's confession (p. 9) it is the word 'mystery' that occurs there, and it is that which evokes wonder.

My acquaintance with the host of other poets and novelists that our authors have talked about is not that intimate that I may say something of significance. Instead, I would say about three pieces that I have enjoyed.

The pieces on Sri Aurobindo are important as he is important both as a poet of consequence and compelling as a critic. If 'beyonding' is the maser concept of Sri Aurobindo's vision, then any talk about the *future* of poetry should be in order. As consciousness evolves so does or should poetry. As far as I could understand, Sri Aurobindo's view of the future poetry as mantra is founded on his critique of the operations of the mind. And if this is to be admitted then there could be no sense in calling his theory of poetry as a *personal* point of view or aesthetic testimony. (p. 129) I feel happier to find out authors alluding to Bhartrhari's philosophy of language. There is a linkage between the analysis of I-consciousness as we find in *Māndukya Upaniṣad*, Bhartrhari's analysis of *Vāk* into the four-fold descent and the Tāntrik view of language espoused by Abhinavagupta. There are traces of all these in Sri Aurobindo, as the capitalization of *pasyanti vāk* displays it beyond doubt. At the end of each of the *udyotas*, Abhinavagupta invokes *para*, *pasyanti*, *madhyama*, and *vaikhari* as goddesses and pays them homage. Even in the Candi, the Devi is identified with *svara*, *mātra*, *mantra*, etc, and Sri Aurobindo himself refers to 'the Tāntrik' view of language as evolving towards the *pasyanti* mode of apperception parallel to the evolution of consciousness. If our authors had paid a little more attention to the metaphysical foundations of Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry, then it would have had a greater contributory value.

There is another point of allied interest. It is indeed a question how far Sri Aurobindo could be aligned to the tradition of Indian aesthetic thought. He does employ the concept of *rasa*, but does he employ it in the identical sense in which the term had been used by the Sanskrit theoreticians? There are valid reasons for saying that Sri Aurobindo either redefines or enlarges its scope in accordance with his metaphysical point of view. Excepting Abhinavagupta, none other Sanskrit writer is explicit about his metaphysical position. Abhinavagupta alone avows his inheritance of Śaiva lineage. Sri Aurobindo has been a free espousal of the critical terms of Sanskrit rhetoric, and he fits them into the body of his own thoughts to serve his own purposes.

The piece on Sangam literature apropos of landscape is an eye-opener and has much to commend itself. But

the one on Andal's poetry of *bhakti* is a jewel of a piece. What a fascinating life of love and passion was Andal's. The female mystic lover's role in her poems breaks down the barrier between the private and the public. One would only wish that more such studies were available in the case of female mystics from other parts of India. I have in mind the case of Mirabai, in particular.

The success of a book depends on its capability in opening windows on the unforeseen vistas, and thereby enlarging the reader's awareness. If this is viewed as an unexceptionable criterion, then the book under review is eminently successful.

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Crafting Traditions: Documenting Trades and Crafts in Early 19th Century North India, Ghulam Yahya, (ed.) and (tr.) with an introduction by Meher Afshan Farooqi, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centres for the Arts and Aryan Books International, 2005, xxxix (introduction) + 127 (facsimile and translation) + 38 pages from the back (printed text), Rs 525.

This book is the published version and translation of a nineteenth century Persian work written by one Ghulam Yahya. Meher Afshan Farooqi located the manuscript of this work in the University of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia, and produced its facsimile edition with a translation. She has written a useful introduction and added an appendix, glossary and index.

The title of the work is not mentioned in the text and there is no fly leaf or colophon. Farooqi mentions in a footnote that the cover of the binding carries the title *Kitab i Tasavir Shishagaran Vaghairah va Bayan i Alat i Anha* (*The Illustrated Book About Makers of Glassware, etc. and a Description of their Tools*). The author, Ghulam Yahya, mentions in the preface that he wrote this book at the behest of the Magistrate and Judge of the District of Bareilly [1818-1822 AD], Robert Glyn, who 'issued forth an order for this ignorant person to write the true details of some of the craftsmen and the names of the tools of manufacture and production and their dress and manners'. In the first half of the nineteenth century, British colonial officials in India prepared statistical and other compilations of information about the size and characteristics of the Indian population in order to build an archive of knowledge about their growing empire and govern it in the best possible interest of the Directors of the East India Company. The information gathered in this way laid the foundation of the official ethnography of the peoples of India in the second half of the eighteenth

century. But not all works were products of intellectual curiosity and administrative demand. Lord and Lady Canning wanted to put together an album 'of a pictorial record of the people, buildings and countryside' as a souvenir of their days in India. The end result was the publication of *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations with Descriptive Letter Press of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan*, edited by John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye. Ghulam Yahya's work broadly falls into the genre of colonial ethnography, but it is extraordinary in the sense that it was prepared by an Indian rather than a British official. This trend was more visible at the turn of the twentieth century when the colonial government assigned the task of preparing detailed reports on industry and economy to its Indian officials. It is also difficult to notice any Persian work written in India during the medieval period on this subject or genre. Persian works written by Indians in nineteenth century on skills and crafts, such as *Majmaul Funun*, may have been following a new tradition.

Ghulam Yahya selected eleven trades and crafts and illustrated their brief descriptions with twelve drawings of tools and five colour paintings of craftsmen. The selection appears to be random and not at all exhaustive although it covers some major craft activities of the region. In the following list, the readers will be amused to find the category of Kabab making which now a days is considered more of a culinary art than an industrial craft.

1. Glass (*dar bayan sakhtan kach*)
2. Glass bangles (*churi kach*)
3. Lac bangles and the tools used (*churi lak wa alat*)
4. Crimper and his tools
5. Gram parchers and their tools
6. *Charpai* weavers and their tools
7. Grocery (*pansari*) shop and prices of goods
8. Wire drawer (*tarkash*)
9. Silver and gold thread and laces
10. Kabab making
11. Goldsmiths, their tools and ornaments they make

Meher Afshan Farooqi has done a marvelous job of retrieving a Persian manuscript from near oblivion (it was callously catalogued as a cook book written in Urdu) and bringing it to the notice of historians of eighteenth century northern India as well as scholars of colonial Indology and ethnography. Those interested in inland commerce and price history will also find the data compiled in this book quite useful. The manuscript is written in the form of rounded letters known as *nastaliq* (I beg to differ from Farooqi that it is *shikasta*) which is not very difficult to read, although the peculiar style followed in accountancy

(*siyaq*) of writing figures as words (*raqam*) needs special skills to decipher. There are very few people in the country who can read these figures and Farooqi is one of them. The book is very well produced and I hope its publication inspires greater interest in the reading of Persian texts as source material for historical investigation.

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Living with Diversity: Forestry Institutions in the Western Himalaya by Sudha Vasani, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2006, pp. xviii + 273, Rs 400.

The traditional system of forest use underwent significant changes during the nineteenth century with the introduction of modern forestry in India. In the last two decades, scholars have produced voluminous work on modern forestry and its impact on the society. The dominant narrative that emerges is like this. The colonial state asserted its claim over forests and reserved them. In the reserved forests, the existing rights of the people were thoroughly redefined. The state forests were then managed for revenue and strategic interests. This intervention in forestry brought state in direct conflict with rural people. This narrative tends to accept the effectiveness of state efforts for 'simplification, ordering, and control' of forests. Sudha Vasani, in the book under review, questions this narrative. She argues that diversity of institutions and practices made it difficult for the state to implement its homogenizing forest policies. The diversity emerges from the 'logic of practices'. It is not merely 'residual diversity that is driven by preexisting ecological, regional or local differences, but is a pattern of diversity that is created and recreated through quotidian practices'. (p. 5) Vasani elaborates practices that create context for continuous reproduction of diversity. Further, Vasani says that diversity is not chaos, and also not 'a set of different and disparate individual units that remain isolated from and uninfluenced by each other and by state policies and practices. Instead it is a tapestry of interwoven variations that are dynamically recreated within the boundaries of structural constraints'. (pp. 5-6)

The book thus elaborates this diversity in case of Himachal Pradesh (HP). It is a monograph on a relatively less explored though very important aspect of the state-society interfaces on forestry in the contemporary HP. Earlier works on HP have either analyzed the ecological context in which society and economy operates,¹ or

discussed forestry practices (particularly pastoral) in the context of national and international debates over environmental degradation.² *Living with Diversity* is significant for three reasons. First, it questions the narrative that sees the state forestry effectively transforming customary forestry practices in the colonial and post-colonial India. Secondly, it analyzes the working of the indigenous forestry institutions and thereby contributes to the existing debates over the nature of community participation in management of forests. Thirdly, it carries a message for the forest department: not to overlook diversity while implementing its homogenizing and standardizing policies as such efforts are bound to fail.

A large part of HP was constituted of multiple princely states in the colonial period; only a small area was under the direct British rule. Varied regimes of land proprietorship and forest rights were therefore natural. Hence settling forest rights in HP became a complex issue. Although in the discussion over princely state in the book, a picture of diverse regime of rights hardly emerges, but in the British ruled Kangra region Vasani successfully shows that land revenue and forest settlements resulted in 'a patch work of different property regimes in the different tehsils of the area'. (p. 89) The diversity, Vasani argues, further resulted from the inability of the state to implement its policies. In this, the role of agency becomes important, hence the author analyzes the working of the lowest level functionary of the forest department, the forest guard. She questions Weberian 'ideal type' in understanding behaviour of the state bureaucracy. Under this, members of modern institutions are seen as 'rational actors'. Through the study of the working of forest guard, Vasani emphasizes that a lower level functionary who is mainly responsible for implementing policies, is 'well entrenched and culturally integrated in the society in which he serves' (p. 114) and that comes in the way of his working. The 'separation between private and professional relationship of field-level staff' as sought by Weberian model 'fails in Indian rural society'. (p. 99) This is one of the most innovative chapters in the book and reveals the mundane socio-political milieu in which the forest guard works. The forest guard lives in duality: he is an official in the place where he is on the official duty and a peasant when he returns to his native village, which he does quite often. Since he combines two works, his private and public functions also get blurred. As a villager he violates forest laws, and as an official he punishes those who infringe forest laws. 'This entrenched nature of institutions in social structures and hierarchies introduces a significant degree of diversity in policy outcomes. Actions of every members of the institution are conditioned by his/her habitus'. (p. 120)

Although some of the points raised by the author are valid, they cannot be extended too far. By this logic the state can never intervene effectively. This leads us to a problematic and contentious terrain of the state-society relationship, which however cannot be discussed here due to constraints of space. However, taking specifically the working of the forest department, we cannot overlook the fact that it had to face constant protest in the colonial and postcolonial period, an evidence of the fact that the forest policies impinged on the everyday life of the people. And the forest guard who was perceived as the representative of the department was often attacked.³ Sometimes even senior officers were also not spared. In the princely state of Tehri Garhwal, a Garhwali Conservator of Forests, who was very much part of the social milieu of the Garhwal society, had to face ire of the people in a popular outburst against settling forest rights.⁴

Further conclusions of Vasani are based on contemporary ethnographic study. A democratic state is definitely 'soft' compared to a colonial state and hence open to varied kinds of pressures. Forest guard might manipulate situation now more easily to his advantage, but it would be interesting to know if a guard was equally free to exercise his will under colonial rule. Thus, although the study of functioning of the forest guard sheds a welcome light on how the forest department works, we need to be careful while drawing broader conclusion from this.

Inability of modern institution to effectively protect environment has led to focus on indigenous institutions. Community based institution, says Vasani, 'have certain advantages in the management of their own forests'. (p. 156) She examines working of some of these institutions of Himachal, particularly that of Kullu district. Institutions discussed are: *vaidis* (traditional healers), collectors of herbs, certain practices of pastoralists, the system of *Rakhas*, and *devbans*. The discussion on *vaidis*, however, seems to be out of place. *Vaidis* are not specific to Himachal and their knowledge of herbs and plants is individualistic and secretive rather than communal. The analysis of working of *devbans*, however, is interesting. This system is similar to that of much celebrated sacred groves, although it contains its own peculiarities. *Devbans* have root in the widely prevalent *devata* system in Himachal. Each village has its own *devata* (deity) which plays dominant role in socio-economic life of villagers. Villages have *devata* committees to manage *devata* related affairs and these also frame rules to manage *devbans*. The system is, however, rapidly changing in the recent years. Socio-political context in which the *devata* system operates cannot be overlooked. Vasani herself has shown that *devatas* have many a times taken controversial decisions

like opposing the creation of the Great Himalayan National Park which had given impetus to the movement against the park. Such instances are increasing in the recent years. Only in the last year, *devatas* opposed the much-publicized decision of the HP Government to grant permission to a multi-national company to build a ski-village in Kullu. Some hydro projects have also been opposed by *devatas* recently. There are allegations that political parties are using the *devata* system to score points over their rivals. Such interventions of divine bodies in the temporal public issues are bound to raise controversies. The working of *devata* committees is becoming more and more controversial, and there is opposition, as Vasana argues, to their undemocratic character. The dominant role of higher caste males in these committees is being resented. And exclusion of women and lower castes from some of the *devbans* is not regarded a welcome feature by many. 'A possible consequence of this traditional inequality is that new *devatas* have emerged who now cater to lower caste villagers'. (p. 180)

The author argues that the *devata* system is on decline due to a number of social economic and cultural changes. This also has an impact on the management of *devbans* and some of them are facing serious threat. Market forces have made inroads in these forests as elsewhere in the country and villagers are tempted to sell the best timber. Hence, according to the author, this ecologically beneficial traditional system is eroding very fast.

The relationship between the forest department and the rural communities is often characterized by conflicts; however Vasana finds in the Kangra Forest Cooperative Societies (KFCS) formed in the 1940s an example of cooperation. Forests of Kangra were rapidly degrading leading to soil erosion and that was causing serious concern to the forest department as well as villagers. There were a very few reserved forests in Kangra and the forest department had little control over other kinds of forests. By providing for cooperatives the department sought cooperation of villagers in improving management of these forests and thereby preventing erosion. The cooperative societies were to be formed with *mauza* as a unit and only with the consent of the three-fourth of the cultivators of the *mauza*. All categories of forests in the village (including reserved) had to be under the cooperatives which could generate revenues by selling forest products. Some societies were financially self sustaining, other depended on grant-in-aid from the government. There was a great enthusiasm and demand for these cooperative societies. Forests under societies had begun to improve. These cooperatives were however not unique, as the author portrays. They resembled *van-*

panchayats of the hill of United Provinces (now Uttaranchal) formed in the 1930s⁵ although there are some basic differences between them.

The KFCS were initially sanctioned only for 5 years, their tenure later extended but government support to them declined after independence, particularly because they were advantageous to a few rich and powerful villagers only. Their popularity declined when efforts were made to replace them by more representative panchayats. They existed for some more time but the process of decline had begun. In spite of some shortcomings, Vasana rightly argues, that the KFCS were 'a living example of an institutional model that succeeded in bridging the gap between a state forestry institution and local people'. (p. 201) And it served as a model for adoption of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) later. However, it should not be forgotten that KFCS were product of a unique situation in which interest of the forest department and villagers could unite. This has not been often the case and is evident in failure of multiple forestry schemes launched since independence. Vasana analyzes these schemes in Chapter 8.

A marked shift took place in forest policies in the 1970s. The forest department now no longer emphasized exclusion of people from forests; rather cooperation of people is sought in forest management. Forests 'began to be seen as a global environmental resource' (p. 207), hence international funding for forest management acquired significance. Funding agencies considerably influence forest policies. Donor funded projects have become a norm. First of such project in HP was social forestry. In many parts of the country it was criticized for being ending up as a farm forestry helping rich farmers.⁶ It has also been criticized for not taking up community participation seriously.⁷ Vasana fails to provide critical assessment of social forestry in HP; one or two specific case studies would have been helpful.

Many small-scale aided projects were launched in the last two decades in HP with emphasis on community participation. The JFM, which generated lot of debate over the issue of community participation in forest management in the country,⁸ was launched in HP in 1993. Vasana argues that it is yet too early to judge the success of JFM in HP. There are multiple forestry schemes in operation in HP, some working at cross-purposes. The past experience is rarely used to learn lessons and enormous resources are wasted in launching new schemes. This will continue to happen unless some unity of purpose and holistic and integrative approach is applied.

Confusion sometimes is a natural outcome of diversity. The crucial question that remains unanswered till the end

in the book is whether the diversity in anyway proved beneficial to forestry in HP. But then Vasani argues that the discussion in the book 'is not centred round the question of whether this diversity is good or bad'. (p. 235) Or is it being suggested that 'live with diversity' is good or bad? But can one afford to say this in case of forestry in the hills, which so significantly affects the life of the people. Addressing the question how diversity shaped the results of forest policies in HP would have been extremely useful.

But there are two significant contributions of the book. One, by questioning the dominant narrative on forestry it is being suggested that efforts at reservation of forests and settlements of rights failed to fully impose a standardized model in HP. It may be partially true, but there can be little doubt on the fact that modern forestry substantially altered the traditional ways of using forests. Forests were also increasingly drawn into market economy leading to their rapid degradation. The impact of these changes may vary from region to region, but no region remained unaffected. Second conclusion of the book is more meaningful and can serve as a guide to future forest policies. It is argued that homogenizing and standardizing policies of the forest department cannot be implemented unless sensitivity is shown to diversity. The book in this sense advocates decision-making at the local level with full involvement of local communities and working of the KFCS and *deobans* should serve as an exemplar. The message to policy makers is that they should learn to 'live with diversity'.

There are few mistakes in the book. There is mention of figures 2.9 and 2.10 on page 67, but the figures are nowhere in the book. The author does not provide full references: Government notifications of the colonial and post-colonial period are referred but without giving detail of sources where they can be found (see pages 95, 153, 204, 231, etc). Notwithstanding this caveat the book is an important addition on the forestry in Himachal Pradesh.

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NOTES

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Pan by Som P Ranchan, Chandigarh: Graphit India, 2006 pp. 71, Rs. 195.

Those of us who have been following the history of growth of Indian writing in English, especially poetry, must hail the publication of Ranchan's latest book, *Pan*, a cyclorama of poems in his by now familiar, though highly original, style. Som P. Ranchan is a formidable genius, and versatile too. In addition to his critical writings on American, British and Indian literature, he has produced creative literature in the genres of poetry, fiction and prose. But he is primarily known as a poet, though he has written books on subjects as diverse as myth, folklore, psychology, therapy and political theory. He is now 75, and even at this age, the imagination of this grand old man of letters functions as furiously as ever. At the time of his retirement in 1992, he had about 25 volumes of poetry to his credit which number has now risen to more than 45. Browning's lines, 'Grow old along with me/the best is yet to be/', seem to have been written for this man.

Alongside his versatility in terms of the genres of creative writing, he is equally versatile in terms of the range of his subjects. His subjects encompass the quotidian world as well as the spiritual, though in his plastic imagination there is a mishmash of the twain. Similarly, the mythic and the individual aspects of his personality merge. Various elements of his psyche—sensual, intellectual, spiritual—seem to

be vying for supremacy in his poetry. That is why in reading his poetry one gets the impression that he is a sensualist who hates the intellect and the spirit; an intellectual who hates the senses and the spirit; and, above all, a spiritualist who hates both the senses and the

intellect.

Pan, a cyclorama of poems on the Greek god Pan, grapples with the same themes that his earlier volumes had been engaged with—self, relationships, connexion or connectivity. However, the emphasis here is markedly different. The overarching thematic network of this book revolving round Pan's symbology has to do primarily with relationships, with connexion, human and non-human, with the universe and the cosmos. In other words, relationship is the keynote of the poems in this collection. Ranchan conceives of connexion at the visceral rather than the cerebral level. In poem after poem, engagement with the 'Other' is postulated as the panacea for the tormented, the traumatized, the sick, the psychopaths, neurotics and psychotics alike. If T S Eliot invites us to 'Come in under the shadow of this Red Rock' to escape spiritual aridity, Ranchan gives a clarion call to experience freedom from ego through relationships. In this sense, he is a latter-day Lawrence who believed that true freedom could only be experienced in relatedness: 'Thank God, I am not free, anymore than a rooted tree is free.' To Ranchan, narcissism or self-love is the worst kind of sin and his message to mankind in poem after poem of this cyclorama is: reach out to the Other *feelingly*, not intellectually. How to connect with the other, with something larger than the self, is seen to be a challenging task: 'How to turn seeds into speaking, scintillating trees/till they become a grove for Pan to walk in/is the real challenge.' (47) In fact, in Ranchan's scheme of things, 'Self and Other are part of the same reality: they are parts of a wider, larger Self. Behind each part there is a vast whole. Other, thus, is a part of that vast, all-inclusive self. Or, to put it differently, other is the projection of the Self. The two usually collide, sometimes caress each other, and occasionally dance together.'

All the poems in this collection, whether dealing with personal experiences or with dreams or with mythological figures like Pan, Panthea, Eros, Dionysios, etc. predicate on relationships. Even when a poem undertakes to 'define' some psychological concepts, the same is done in terms of relationships: 'Though feeling is all/it is sister to insight/Thinking is the sibling brother/The prodigal who goes astray again and again/Sensation be my metier/I revel in sight, sound, smell/but touch above all/touch caressing/incorporating pith and substance/of all things.' (21) And this is how Dionysios is described: 'Dionysios is not Eros/He is unbridled/Draws woman to his rude clasp/till he has his will/Is vital, larger than life/Is into aggrandisement/yet enlarges the lives of women/. . . /Turns their face to freedom/to fresh woods and pastures new of Pan.' (29)

This brings me to the execution part of the poems. All Ranchan's poems have been written in what may be termed dialogic form which makes for a very strong dramatic element in his poetry. The dialogic form is quite overt in his longer poems of epic meditations on Wisdom figures like Vivekananda, Christ, Mother Sharda, Buddha, Krishna, Aurobindo and the tantric She. This is evident even from the titles of some of his poems such as: *Me and Columbia* (1968); *Christ and I* (1982); *To Vivek then I came* (1984); *Soul-making with Sri Aurobindo* (1986); *To Krishna with Love*, etc. However, even in those cycles of poem where the dialogic form remains subdued, the dramatic element is as strong as ever. In one of the most touching and personal poems, 'When someone dies' in the present volume, for example, the death of a friend is mourned in the first six stanzas, And then, quite unobtrusively the poem glides into the dialogic form:

I asked Pan, my dybbuk

"How did you die, Pal?"

He replied from a dingle
deep as doom;

"Faeries, left for Fresh wood, and pastures new

My fauns grieved, shrieked
themselves to nihil

I lost my raison d'etre

I went boom -"

"Just like that," said I, stunned with amaze (58)

This is perhaps what the new-fangled theories of literature and literary criticism call depersonalization of emotion, and of the medium. It has to be noted though that, staying in tune with other elements of his poetry, Ranchan's is an impassioned depersonalization, impelled as it is less by the intellect and more by an effortless dispersal of feeling.

Finally, a word of suggestion to those readers who might exclaim, 'What have we to do with this mythical figure Pan in this age of technology?' To such readers I would urge that they read its rather longish subtitle: A book of verse on Greek God Pan, his *Symbology, Depth Psychology and its Implications for Living*. The last four words of the subtitle serve to emphasize the fact that the world of myth is not far removed from the quotidian world as some are wont to think. Myth, in a very real sense, is the sum total of human wisdom and experiences, of man's most subtle and finest aspirations. For, doesn't Ranchan tell us that Pan is 'All God, our umbilical cord to Nature'?(24)

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Silent Tongues: Writings in Contemporary Indian Poetry by Rabindra K Swain, New Delhi: Authorspress, 2006, viii+189 pp., ISBN: 81-7273-319-4, Rs. 450

Indian English poetry has been developed as a competent craft, a felicity of expression and a surety of image-making. It embodies India in modalities ranging from stark but intense description to dreamlike webs of association—an India whose image mirrors a poetic sensibility rooted inextricably in her. It has now become a commonwealth craze and a veritable mine of material for researchers and academics.

Silent Tongues by Rabindra K Swain interprets the general phenomenon of nature in Indian English poetry in terms of the social space at a given time and the prevailing worldview. Many important poets are respectfully considered, honestly differed from, and authentically repudiated by a pen that is precise and sharply pointed. Rabindranath Tagore in 'Heaven of Freedom' says, 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;/where knowledge is free.' Swain's study of Indian English poetry is an exhaustive survey—a viable synthesis of thought and expression. He, 'with the mind is without fear', makes an attempt to define the new bearings in Indian English poetry while considering established reputations like AK Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Arun Kolatkar and Meena Alexander.

'Scholarship with Wings: The Poetry and Prose of A K Ramanujan' is a critical discourse on Ramanujan's 'attitudes to Indian past'. Swain's critical argument is based on his scholarship in the field, as well as his natural involvement in 'the process of creation'. Swain, critically examines later poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra and forms his own observations in a beguilingly simple language. He rates Mahapatra as one of the best who writes on the ruins of the past. Silenced stones where history froze in experience even speaks in Mahapatra's poetry. Feelings that question, his culture's and his own links with the land of Orissa is an indeterminate destiny. It paves a tension that reaches out to the reader. These days, Mahapatra rates himself as a 'bilingual poet'. Swain's competent pen frankly admits, 'His diction in Oriya is lacking in felicity, as he is not well conversant with the language found in contemporary Oriya writing'. In 'Procrustes Bed' Swain introduces a seminal issue related to Indian poetry, 'Indian poetry is one'. There is always a great divide between the so-called boundaries. Boundaries dissolve with shared experiences. Regional poetry as flourished in different parts of India collectively celebrates a shared note of Indianness. Most of the translated poetry books are like 'Procrustes's Bed'. We cannot deny the fact that translated poetry is forged with smithy of Indian cultural tradition.

The present study by Swain is primarily an attempt to identify and critically evaluate the various new voices in Indian English poetry, in the present, who have given it freshness and vitality rarely achieved before. Swain deals with new poets like Bibhu Padhi, Sudeep Sen, Sujata Bhatt and Makarand Paranjape who are no longer 'new' in Indian English poetry scenario.

Bibhu Padhi's poetry is a queer blend of sensuous and gloom as if drawn from the quizzical despair of modern man and his predicament. He illustrates that poetry need not be oblique in order to be effective and enjoyable. Swain introduces Sudeep Sen as a 'conscious artist'. He could have explained Sudeep's 'distracted' social/geographical space from the available postcolonial theoretical models. Sujata Bhatt puts forward the problems of the diaspora. Her poems record history in shifting places, language and culture. A strange sense of loss pervades Sujata's poems. A small review on Makarand Paranjape's *Used Book* gives a sketchy idea of the critic-poet. Paranjape's poetry stands with the authenticity of experience, depth of observation and power of visual imagery. His poems pose to see the spaces between objects.

I am confused when Swain is critical to young poets: 'Young poets today have nothing remarkable to offer.' The approach seems to me selective. I doubt whether Swain's criticism points towards the young poets' occasional slide into platitudes, weightless thoughts and ineffective employment of metaphors which fail to articulate human condition. I'm reminded of Toru Dutt's, 'The flowers look loveliest in their native soil.'

Chapter 20, 'Relating Poetry to the Society' creates a space for contemporary Oriya poetry to search its root in the cultural milieu in which the social space is being located. Swain sets the tone for re-consideration. The terms in which social psychology is couched are the familiar ones of 'belief' and 'desire', 'hunger', 'pain' and so forth. According to many theorists, social psychology plays a central role in our capacity to predict and explain the behaviour of ourselves and others. However, the nature and status of social psychology remains controversial. Swain, too, leaves the possibilities open:

'All this is not to cancel the present Oriya poetry totally.' His critical argument gradually becomes a modern day political discourse and he rightly argues in favour of non-interference of politics in the public life. Poets have their role to make things better to live in.

Like a compulsive postcolonial critic Swain thinks, 'Poetry is a subculture' in Orissa. In his article entitled 'Priests in a Town of Agnostics', he critically examines the status of Oriya poets today in close relationship with new value readership. Contemporary Oriya poetry is an open space. The young Oriya poets, as a competent

generation, have challenges to cross the webs of compulsive pulls towards its past. Rajendra Kishore Panda, a significant Oriya poet, has nothing for displacement of culture. He returns to the land of Jagannatha again and again to unearth the gold mine of cultural, social and spiritual tradition.

The book concludes with a detailed interview with Jayanta Mahapatra with whom Rabi Swain runs a magazine called *Chandrabhaga*. In the course of the interview Jayanta Mahapatra explicitly explains his position in the literary space. We are astonished to learn that Jayanta Mahapatra still uses his old manual typewriter. For him 'old habits die hard'. There lies the greatness of this seventy-eight-year old Indian English poet residing at Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack. Swain successfully brings out the private self of the poet through intelligent questions. His genuine concern for the pain and suffering of the present day world comes to the surface during the course of conversation with the interviewee.

No critical anthology on poetry can be complete enough to discuss all the issues and all the renowned poets in the corpus of discussion. We can never expect of any totality of the matrix of that sort. *Silent Tongues* is silent for many promising (already established) poets writing in English. The interview with Mahapatra is an

informative one. However, it leaves a few things open. Why does Swain incorporate this interview? Is Mahapatra a *Silent Tongue*? Mahapatra stands out to be the chief force of inspiration for many promising young poets writing in English.

This collection of essays provides insights into key poets in the sphere of Indian English poetry. Indian poetry has achieved a prominent place in the rapidly growing field of postcolonial studies, challenging the tradition of British, Australian and American writing in literary studies. Approaching Indian poets through the perspectives of history, identity, and the landscape, this collection is wide-ranging and supplies a distinctively Indian perspective on some of the literary voices which are widely studied in Indian universities. This collection of (stray!) essays on different issues related to contemporary 'Silent Tongues' adds a timely and valuable contribution to the study of Indian Poetry in English in India.

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The volume is a collection of the twenty-three research papers contributed by erudite scholars in different parts of the country. The papers were presented in the National Seminar held at Shantiniketan and organised jointly by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and Vishwa-Bharati. This volume is bound to be an asset for those interested in the field of Buddhism.

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