

Book Reviews

Meenakshi Bharat and Nirmal Kumar, eds., *Filming the Line of Control: the Indo-Pak relationship through the cinematic lens*, London, NY, Delhi: Routledge, 2008.

The uncanny sense of 'timing' of this collection of essays edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Nirmal Kumar is perhaps most evident with the 4th April, 2008 release of *Khuda Ke Liye*, the first Pakistani film to be released in India after four decades. Indeed as the editors point out in this welcome collection, cinema is both a very useful as well as important site for raising questions/understanding the complex nature of subcontinental politics. For that reason, as also for introducing new scholars in the field, this book marks an important contribution. It is so also because it introduces work on a theme – the relationship between India and Pakistan as represented in cinema – as well as a range of recent films (*Main Hoon Naa*, *Veer Zaara*, *Lakshya* etc) that have not yet got the critical attention they deserve. As the editors point out in their Introduction, it is noteworthy that the 'classical' decade of Bombay cinema was almost completely silent on the traumatic birth of the nation; the horrendous violence of the Partition. Subsequently, while there have been since *Hindustan Ki Kasam*, 1971, many Bombay films that have explicitly used Pakistan as a central point of reference, there has also appeared a new set of films on this general theme over the last two decades. This is simultaneous with the process of re-engagement the two nations are involved in as they attempt, yet again, to move on from a very difficult past. Most emphatically therefore, the significant 'point' of this book is not whether one does or does not endorse a specific reading of a film but the importance of its larger theme. And as the editors underline, the vital need for continuing dialogue. As part of this larger effort, they also highlight the need for a catholicity of ideological and theoretical frameworks in film-scholarship and in the essays selected.

There are thirteen essays divided among four sections:

'Negotiating the Border', 'Drawn Lines,' 'Rapprochement' and 'Interviews.' Kishore Budha's inaugural essay, "Genre Development in the Age of Markets and Nationalism: The War Film" is a study of the war film in Bombay cinema. In undoubtedly a harsh comment on the state of popular film-criticism in/on India Budha concludes:

[T]he lack of unity in the discourse of various interest groups, demonstrat[es] the inability of organised capital to set the agenda and institutionalise the war film.... Media criticism is limited to debates about the form and styles such films should take... [A]ll critical discussion of the war film leads to the oft repeated focus on *Haqeeqat* and *Border*. This eventually closes all opportunities for further examination of genre. This demonstrates that far from modernising, the Hindi film continues to be influenced by socio-political formations. (p.18)

The underlying assumption that Hollywood/ 'organised capital' should be the norm in terms of either film-genres [form/style] or film-criticism/theory actually counters the article's own polemic in several places. But of course and much more strongly, the other essays in the collection themselves implicitly contest Budha's remarks. The next piece, by Adrian Athique, "Aggression and Transgression on the India-Pakistan Border" is a close-reading of the first two of J.P.Dutta's war trilogy, *Border*, 1997 and *Refugee*, 2000. Pointing out the ideological difficulties in imagining and drawing borders, the article notes the many subtle ways in which *Refugee* was even a rejoinder to *Border*, while embracing its larger politics. This general concern is carried further in Rajinder Dudrah's, "Borders and Border Crossings in *Main Hoon Naa* and *Veer-Zaara*." An important point that Dudrah highlights in this context is, " [those] moments also in contemporary Bollywood cinema where the use of the border and, by implication, the Indo-Pak self/other dichotomy is not as easily coded and perhaps allows for more fluid representational possibilities at and across the Indo-Pak border [than 'war' films like *Lakshya*]..." (p.41)

His analysis of *Veer Zaara* especially brings out the ways in which a border is always also a symbolic space.

To my mind the next set of essays brings out in especially sensitive detail the intimate and particular violence that drawing borders involves vis-à-vis women. There has of course been a rich body of work on women and the Partition over the last three decades. Undoubtedly energised by this scholarship but also extending it to new domains Meenakshi Bharat's essay, for instance, "Partition Literature and Films: *Pinjar* and *Earth*" lays out in fascinating detail the ways in which Bapsi Sidhwa's own life and identity as a Pakistani and Parsi seep into her novel, further transformed by Deepa Mehta's *auteurial* sensibilities. Or the significance, among other things, of using mainstream Bombay heroines such as Urmila Matondkar in the lead role in *Pinjar*. Claudia Preckel in, "Millions of Daughters of Punjab Weep Today: The Female Perspective in Partition Films" discusses the ways in which ideological notions of female honour centrally define community/nation/religion in the Partition films. As she observes, motifs of sexual violence help to re-affirm stereotypes of 'masculinity' around which communities define themselves. This, apart from highly charged tropes such as 'Mother India' and the violation of the nation. Savi Munjal further extends this broad concern through a close reading of Sabiha Sumar's *Khamosh Pani* in, "Broken Memories, Incomplete Dreams: Notes Towards an 'Authentic' Partition Cinema." This essay also most directly negotiates with questions of narrative form/ 'realism' in cinema and the need to imagine a new feminist aesthetics/ film-practice within the context of South Asia/Pakistan. The last essay in this section Kamayini Kaushiva's, "Partitioned Memories: The Trauma of Partition in Ghatak's Films" discusses the 'other' border and highlights the haunting psychic and social scars for, again, *women*, in the trilogy of the great Ritwik Ghatak.

The third section begins with Sunny Singh's, "Defining a Non-Pakistan-centric Post-Globalisation Self in Hindi Cinema 1996-2006." Wide-ranging in reference, the article examines the historical shifts in the signifier 'Pakistan,' in Bombay cinema over the last two decades. An interesting thesis Singh puts forward is that as a new generation, unaffected by the immediacy of the Partition comes into own, the relevance of this signifier also diminishes. In its place moreover a new popular history emerges, with a spate of films on *pre*-Partition figures such as Mangal Pandey and Subhash Bose. The next piece is Nirmal Kumar's, "Kaisi Sarhad, Kaisi Majbooriyan": Two Countries, Two Enemies, One Love Story." Locating *Henna* and *Veer Zaara* both within the tradition of Pakistan-positive/centric films in Bombay as well the

respective oeuvres of their directors, Kumar foregrounds representations of their female protagonists. *Henna* and *Zaara* are both free-spirited and strong willed. Willing to take risks as well as the initiative in their relationships. Moreover the positive portrayals of the regional nationalisms of *Kashmiriyat* and *Punjabiyyat* in these films, is also an important point he contends, in the ways in which popular culture might reinvent the border, or the irrelevance of it. The third piece in this section Aparna Sharma's, "My Brother, My Enemy: Crossing the Line of Control Through the Documentary" is, as the title suggests, again a meditation on narrative form. Through a close-reading of a documentary made by two friends from India and Pakistan respectively, who met at film-school in London, she indicates the formal/ theoretical possibilities offered by formats such as the documentary in re-writing histories of South Asia as opposed to the ideological closure of the mainstream narrative film of Bombay. The fourth piece, reflecting an important trend in film-studies, adopts an audience-research/ reception-studies approach. It offers many interesting insights into the ways in which young audiences in Bombay and London engage with/decode/read the film-texts on the ground, as it were.

The collection ends with thoughtful interviews with doyens from both sides of the border – Aijaz Gul, M.S.Sathyu, Javed Akhtar and Mahesh Bhatt.

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Poetry With Young People, ed. Gieve Patel. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007, Rs. 80, pp. 134.

For some months now I have been wondering if it would be feasible to collect poetic outbursts of youngsters, particularly teenagers across the country from school magazines and other sources to get a peep into the psyche of juvenile India. But the enormity of the task made me diffident and I postponed venturing into it. Indeed, I felt delighted when I received a review copy of *Poetry With Young People*; and also pleasantly surprised that what I just contemplated was actually accomplished by Gieve Patel.

Complied and edited by Gieve Patel, a well-known poet, playwright and painter all rolled into one, *Poetry With Young People* is the outcome of workshops he conducted at Rishi Valley School over a period of ten years. The anthology has been befittingly dedicated to "Rishi Valley School: the People, the Place;" it contains one hundred and fifty poems of varied length from two-

liners to full-page poems; and also has nineteen sketches by renowned artists: Nilima Sheikh, Anju Dodiya, Sudhir Patwardhan and Atul Dodiya. The poems are written by students – both boys and girls – between 12 to 18 years of age. The sentiments expressed in these poems range from simply everyday to intensely personal to delicately sublime, with a few limericks displaying the naughty humour of robust youth as in the poem "Gopal Menon!!!"

Oof! That Gopal Menon,
What a pain he is!
He actually licks his toes,
He once even sucked his toes! (p. 21)
Another I found quite comic is "Dog":
Runs like a cheetah,
Hides like a mouse,
When it comes to food,
Eats like a dog. (p. 110)

Humour generated by words, caricatures and situations can be spotted in many poems. Also, a reader can sense fondness and warmth running quietly underneath the cadence of some of their verses. Muthu A, chooses to write on a stray dog on the campus called 'Tripod' by the students for his deformity, and much loved by them. The poet keenly observes its traits and asks with affection, "Does he think he is a king?" and answers the question with admiration: "He is small and majestic/He does think he is a king." (p. 122). Interestingly, the sketch on the adjoining page shows Tripod with a crown. Bilawal Singh Suri is touched by the void in the life of an unemployed person in "Unemployment" while Vigyan's heart goes out to the small boy pulling rickshaw when he should rather be in school. Not haranguing on child labour, the verse nevertheless reveals the evil.

The editor's introductory remarks provide a brief history of Rishi Valley School which helps a reader in placing the poems in their proper perspective. Rishi Valley School is situated in a shallow valley four hour's drive from Bangalore City. The area was arid and barren when the school was established in 1930 but the authorities undertook an almost visionary project of planting trees in the surrounding area and at present the entire valley is ecologically rich. Gieve Patel puts it thus, "The school sought the help of ecologists, students and neighboring villagers for this purpose. The result of this visionary activity is a transformed environment. The hills and the valley are full of trees, there are water bodies with birds and tiny animals whenever the rain gods are reasonably generous, species of birds that had never been seen in the valley before have started to make it their

home, and the valley has been declared a bird sanctuary" (xxiii).

No wonder then that many of the poems display the children's love for nature. There are scintillating poems on birds, butterflies, trees, wind and rain. In "Kingfisher" a young poet minutely observes the bird preying dexterously. Its agility is captured in quick rhythmic lines that have Shelleyan lilt: A speck of blue/On the black wires/A sudden flash/A ripple in the water./He's up again./Silver lights flicker in his beak. (p. 90).

The rain is welcome as it waters the trees and plants and makes streams and lakes around (p. 81) but another poet feels sorry for a fallen tree in a rain-storm. Apart from the sentiments expressed here, a reader may marvel at the poetic craft: its rhythmic structure and evocative language (p. 42). The adjoining page has a meaningful sketch by Atul Dodiya of a fallen tree thus highlighting the poet's pain. Dev Gopalkrishna's "The Scorpion" (p.44) eloquently notes the predator laying in wait for its prey and one cannot help recalling Nissim Ezekiel though one admits that the structure and theme of this poem is certainly original and has no bearing on "Ezekiel's "The Night of the Scorpion".

Let us look at the working of the juvenile imagination and contrast this stinging creature with the delicate beauty of the butterfly fluttering around. The scorpion is a "cunning hunter", "he always picks on bugs/ That are smaller than him" (p.44); and the butterfly sees even small stuff big, "Imagine a butterfly/ Looking at a ball!" Both the poems say a lot in a controlled fashion. These observations of the external world when inter-mingled with introspection have almost transcendental overtones. Let us turn to "The Walk". The persona walks into his dormitory and comes out depressed; its "white walls, white curtains, white sheets" sending in him a sense of desolation and bleakness. Impulsively, he takes a long walk amid nature. The sun's morning beauty dazzles him, nature soothes his ruffled nerves and when he walks back into the same dormitory, it looks like heaven. The poet concludes with Wordsworthian mysticism: "I felt I could cling on to any blade of grass, / I was ready to take on the world" (p. 120).

No subject is taboo for these young minds. There are two poems on as trivial a thing as a dustbin. In Divyangana's poem the dustbin announces 'USE ME' (p.11) and in Ajay Krishnan's it says, 'I take ANYTHING' (p. 107). Brightly colored and glinting in sunlight, the dustbin, despite its fate, looks cheerful and Divyangana wonders "... how it stays cheerful and bright" (p.11) while Ajay queries, "How does it feel to be a dustbin" (p. 107).

The subjects tackled are many and varied. There are

cheerful pieces on everyday objects; loving portraits of mothers, grandmothers, teachers; naughty moments with brothers and sisters; introspective verses on the 'self'; and bewildered utterances on the inscrutable and the unfathomable. I would like to mention two of the poems that amused me by their smooth, childlike observations and mischievous realism: "Woes of a Confucius" and "To A Noisy Neighbour." Chaitanya Reddy R. dexterously plays on the word 'confusion' and uses it all through his fourteen lines and succeeds in creating the effect of confusion: I am confused by confusing things/ And it confuses me more to try and deconfuse/The confusing things so that they may stop confusing me/I tried and got confused evermore... The confusing task of a confused Confucius".(83)

It is noteworthy that he does not mention what that confusion thing is; and yet the effectivity bewilders.

In the poem "To a Noisy Neighbour" Anandi Rao categorically tells the neighbour to talk in a low voice and to stop the decibel floating across the fence: "Talking is your birthright/ But sleeping could be mine" (p. 105).

Let us admit, despite all our love for poetry, that in today's competitive world, reading/writing poetry appears a waste of time and any such activity that is not part of the curriculum is rated extraneous. To have to do a workshop on poetry in a school means to encounter resentment. Gieve Patel experienced this when he started his workshop; he could sense mild undercurrents of ennui and resistance in many students. But once the process began, the children enjoyed the exercise. Really, isn't it always exciting to be borne on the wings of imagination? Or else why should Keats advocate "Ever let the fancy roam/ Pleasure never is at home"? The purpose was not to produce Wordsworths or Shelleys or Sarojini Naidus out of the youngsters but to encourage them to give vent to their innermost thoughts. Poetry is art, and may be art is "madness" yet, expressing feelings and sentiments is de-stressing and poetic sensibility/sensitivity has that redeeming quality. These children who may or may not become poets will certainly enjoy re-reading these verses in their spare time some years hence.

The book under review has all the potential to be a prized possession of poetry lovers and scholars. The poems are well-polished, finished pieces. The expert touch of the editor's hand is visible but the magic is worked without harming the basic structure. The production is flawless but I feel the poems could have been arranged subject-wise or theme-wise; in its present arrangement these appear scattered. Mention of class of each student who wrote the piece/s would have given the reader a tool to understand the mind of the child-

poet. Another point pertains to cover design. The cover is imaginative but it is subdued and sad. It could have been as sparkling and effervescent as the spirit of the young poets.

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Dharma: The Categorical Imperative, (eds.) Ashok Vohra, Arvind Sharma, and Mrinal Miri, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi 2005, pp.vi+466, Rs. 800.

The anthology *Dharma: The Categorical Imperative* consists of a brief Introduction and eighteen essays which were presented in the International Conference of the identical nomenclature in 1997 with the purpose to provide an alternative interpretation of the concept of 'Dharma' while taking into view the influence of Western notion of religion and treating it as an epistemological and not as a moral concept. Here Dharma has been understood as a category, as an intellectual exercise, for 'viewing' Indian reality.

The Introduction also informs us that 'the categorical imperative' being close to Kant's Categorical Imperative 'added a measure of creative confusion to the conference' (p.4). The question arises: what was the purpose of the creation of the confusion? Editors explain that although both of these concepts denote 'constituting a category', they preferred 'Categorical Imperative' instead of Kant's 'Categorical Imperative' as the latter is loaded with 'philosophical and ideational association'. Fair enough, but what about the word 'Imperative'? Isn't this too similarly loaded? If editors really wished to save themselves of such a load why did they prefer a topic which created confusion of being Kantian? It seems the purpose of the creation of conceptual confusion was to depict our present state of affairs in which we seem to hang on at the cross-roads of the intermingling of various cultures, and finally to make clear our own horizon of understanding.

Dharma has been interpreted as a concept existing between, on the one hand 'religion' which is exclusively transcendental and, on the other 'civilization' which is ideological and devoid of any transcendence. The question arises: how could Dharma as a *purushartha* be devoid of transcendence as it is a means to Moksha? One who treats Dharma as without transcendence seems to hold transcendence as something (as a Platonic idea) which is so sacrosanct that it is not only beyond sense experience but also beyond cognition. The editor's compulsion in treating Dharma as devoid of

transcendence is that here it is treated as an epistemological category and not as a moral category. However, Dharma, whether it is moral or epistemological, cannot be explained away as a fact.

The fundamental question is this: what constitutes the concept of Dharma in the context of our changing forms of life? i.e. what are the aspects of Dharma on which Western influence is to be noted? The contributors of the anthology have opted for different aspects of the constitutive elements of Dharma such as secularism, nationalism, modernity, and feminism.

Issues related to secularism such as secular and non-secular debate, religious fanaticism/ fundamentalism, and pseudo-secularism have invariably been associated with almost every debate and discussion in social sciences and humanities. And, interestingly, Indian intellectuals have been divided into two mutually-exclusively groups. In this anthology, secularism has been treated as a category which influenced upon contemporary Indian life-style. Makrand Paranjape in his essay 'Secularism vs. Hindu Nationalism: Integrating the Terms of the Debate' aptly shows that religious fundamentalism cannot be fought with Western notion of secularism because such a notion lacks any genuine native-support. For him, 'university-bred radicalism cannot survive without a continuous patronage from the West because, ultimately, it derives not only its agenda but its legitimacy from the West' (p. 274). Paranjape favours *sarvadharma samabhava* of Gandhi. However, basic structure of the essay seems to attack Hindutva in the guise of the attack on secularism as religionlessness as it finds such a concept of secularism inappropriate to fight religious fundamentalism. Paranjape uses the conception of *sarvadharma samabhava* as a tool to combat Hindutva. But in his argumentation for above conclusion, he so often reiterates that 'then only we can fight Hindutva' that he seems to loose ground because there is no need to say that. It is so because such a statement propels negativism. Further, Paranjape does not differentiate between 'dharmic secularism' and 'secular dharma', although he uses these terms at the end of his essay. However, his attempt is commendable, and different from the so called pseudo seculars, so long as he proposes a genuine compromise between fanaticism as a whole (not necessarily Hindu/Muslim shades). In this context following point of views have far reaching consequences: 'Hindutva can be defeated only when a genuine secularism works to support a genuine Hinduism' (p.273) and '...intellectuals are not so much secularist as statist; there is only a slight difference of shade between the red and the saffron' (p. 269).

Likewise the crux of Srinivasa Rao's essay 'Philosophy, Religion, and Secularism' is to delineate nature of the

secularism which is suited to Indian context through questioning the relevance of the framework of the ideas, in the form of our constitution, brought from the West. In order to do that first he explains the nature and role of Philosophy in the West as well as in India. He describes that the modern notion of state did never exist in India. And here Philosophy and Religion have always been inseparable. Here philosophy talks about salvation whereas in the West this job is done by religion. Further he discusses as to how secularism arose in the West and concludes that there secular and democratic characters of a state grew together: '*if it is democratic it also has to be invariably secular*' (p. 41). But this has not been the case with India where 'religion also exercises control over several secular aspects of social life' (p. 44).

Rao has hit upon a very significant issue of continuous disintegration of Indian society as a whole which is basically caused by the Articles 29 and 30 of our constitution which give protection to minorities to preserve their culture and religion. Such a continuous protection has not let the minorities mingle up with the mainstream of our nation as, on the one hand, minorities do not leave any chance to make hue and cry every now and then about state's infringing on their constitutional rights, and on the other, it is the staple diet of majority fundamentalism (as minority claims) as majority seems to have developed a feeling of being regarded as second grade citizens. As there is no end to this bickering of Indian social fabric, Rao rightly puts: 'the situation is hotting up as days are rolling by...' (p. 47). For Rao the basic cause of this state of affair is 'the politicization of religion' (p. 47) which often coerces him to think that 'a fate similar to that of the Soviets might be waiting for the Indians round the corner' (p. 22). Rao's position is certainly vindicated. However, let me add some more fuel to his argumentation by way of adding that caste politics including reservation politics in the guise of social justice is equally responsible for apparently bleak future of India so far as the survival of a secular and just state is concerned.

Rao's argument has also been supported by K. Dad Prithipaul in his paper 'Hindu Dharma and Indian Funk' as he argues that Indian secularism is a product of the Emergency. R.S. Bhatnagar in his essay, "Religion' or 'Dharma': Meaning and Motivation: Primarily in Indian Context' has a different point of view as he treats Dharma, *mazhab* and religion in similar sense (p.19). In order to arrive at his equalisation between Dharma and Religion, Bhatnagar tries to present a confused gamut of meanings of the terms on the basis of his generalisation that the notion of Dharma in Hindus, Jainas, Baudhas and Sikhs has different denotations. It is not certain as to what

prompted Bhatnagar to ignore the differences between Dharma and Religion as even Introduction of the anthology acknowledges the exclusive character of religion.

As any discussion of secularism remains partial in absence of consideration of its Indian background, K. Dad Prithipaul's discussion on Indian 'cultural mimicry' (p. 279), through which he points out the usage of English words, in common speaking of vernacular languages, is quite enlightening. Actually the situation is such that even if a North Indian does not know, e.g. Tamil language, but knows few words of English, he can understand as to what two Tamilians are talking about. Prithipaul's essay brings out the relevance of nationalist thinking and western influence on our day to day life.

A considerable impact of modernity and modern ways of living is visible on the classical notion of Dharma. In this area Godabarisha Mishra in his essay 'Dharma – Its Normative Base and Orthopraxeic Frame: Concept of Dharma and its Implications in Dharmashastras' shows that 'Hinduism has an innate dynamism which gives enough scope for adopting modernism and the changing needs of modernity' (p. 73). For Mishra the source of this dynamism of Hindu Dharma is its 'constant interaction with different modes of thinking' as well as its method of 'questioning'. Mishra stresses on this peculiarity of the notion of Dharma in his detailed analysis of the multiple facets of Dharma including its normative nature and its descriptions in Dharmashastras. Likewise Saranindranath Tagore in his essay 'India, Europe, and Modernity', while analysing modernity in the context of the peculiarity of India's cultural ethos, expresses that the 'Indian and European conceptions of modernity are not identical formulations' (p.130).

The feminist issues have been brought about in two essays, at the end of the anthology, by Annapurna Devi Pandey and Ashmita Khasnabish. The recurrent issues of any discussion on Women and, second, there is a difference between what is written in the text and its application in practice. That is to say, Hindu texts have not been kind to women and that whatever goodness they have described about women cannot be found in real life situation. Ashmita Khasnabish's essay, 'Women in the East and Women in the West' puts these two issues as: "first of all, the Hindu religious texts are self-contradictory; secondly, there is a hiatus between the theory and the practice" (p.423). Annapurna Devi Pandey in her essay 'Stri Dharma: Wife's Duties' delineates this issue as a difference between text and context. Both Khasnabish and Pandey harp on the similar themes with the difference that former is severe in her critique of descriptions about women in Hindu as well as Christian

texts whereas the latter confines herself to Indian context.

Annapurna Devi Pandey concentrates on showing wife as *pativrata* as described in Indian ethos and wife as a modern liberated soul as found in the West. She interprets former as a subordinate to man whereas latter as the one who treats her husband as a friend and understands her familial, professional and personal needs. The latter, for Pandey, are the one who "represent resistance to the age-old subordination of women to their men folks" (p. 420). The difference between former and latter for her is the difference between textual and contextual representation of women. Pandey as a critic of the 'textual' (as represented in Hindu religious texts) builds up her argument in favour of the contextual with the help of case study among NRIs and has argued that it could as well be applicable to the class of educated women in India. As such there seems everything fine with Pandey's analysis, after all who would have guts to represent himself as a supporter of the so called male-sovereignty. However, it is necessary here to raise some points for the purpose of debate. It may be argued that the *pativrata* conception does not take away a female's freedom of will in such a way that it could loose its own shine. In fact it does synchronize freedom and responsibility in such a way that there seems to be no conflict. Had it not been so perhaps *panchkanya* conception, which Dr. Pandey has analysed as having western feminist zest, would have been described differently or perhaps would have not been described at all. The fact that the same text which talks about *pativrata* also holds women's dignity in a very high spirit reveals a holistic life pattern of Indian ethos. It is such a life-pattern which the West is trying to emulate these days.

However, the point is neither as to which life-style (Indian or Western) is better nor whether women's condition in pre-vedic period was good or bad. Rather, point is that marriage in Indian ethos has not been regarded as a *samskara* and not as a contract (as aptly put by Dr. Pandey). In Indian conception of marriage both women as *pativrata* and women as liberated soul cohere with each other in such a way that it's not only difficult but also impossible to glean one and leave the other. The two mutually contradictory interpretations, i.e. women as *pativrata* and women as a liberated soul, overlook the fact that the seemingly exclusive predictions about Indian women in texts on Dharma actually coalesce them. Keeping aloof from these two interpretations, the point to be noted is that there is no point in questioning the richness of the texts and the culture as reflected in them. Here 'richness' does not stand for an artificial conceptual whole which holds both these colours and boosts to reflect diversity as opposed to singularity. Unlike, as Dr. Pandey

has espoused in her essay, in fact, the concept of women as a liberated soul does not contradict the conception of women as a *pativrata*.

Further, Hindu Dharma holds that there is a balance between a conception of women as *pativrata* and as a liberated soul. Those who hold only the former often quote '*yatra naryastu pujyante ramante tantra devata*' and the supporters of the latter, e.g. quote *Manu Smriti* and *Tulsidas*' some verses as critiques of the former. In fact there is a need to reinterpret our texts, as Pandey has pointed out, but as against her it can be held that there is no need to move away from at least those aspects of our ethos which talk about family as a whole and unlike West do not emphasise on nuclear family. An evidence in favour of this argument is that currently there is a tendency in NRI's, specially those who have migrated from Gujarat and Punjab to America and Europe, to come back to their respective natives for the purpose of getting married their offspring.

Khasnabish although focuses on a critique of conditions of women in Hindu texts and Indian context, being true to her feminist spirit, she points out the 'problems of the East' (423) and 'problems of the West' (432) when it comes to talk about women: West ignores women theoretically but East does so practically (432). It's not that about women everything is wrong in Hindu texts, so she does not hesitate to appreciate what is written, for example, in *Upanishads* and *Kamasutra*. However, a feminist critic cannot hold on to what is appreciative about women folks in Indian ethos, so she extensively quotes *Manu* and also brings about dowry deaths in contemporary India as a problems of the East.

Khasnabish holds, 'Indian Women in the twenty-first century cannot just remain concealed under the category of 'subaltern'. . . (working class and non-elite)' (430). While applying Luce Irigaray's theories of *Jouissance* – corporeal and spiritual love – Khasnabish maintains that we have it in our tradition but need to learn as to how to practice it as only that could transform Indian women (445). Khasnabish seems to have a balanced approach in her analysis as she talks about multiple aspects of womanhood, such as theory and practice, East and West, and corporeal and spiritual love. However in her haste she describes Sankhya's conception of soul (*purusha*) and matter (*prakrti*) as male and female respectively.

Due to its normative and flexible character Dharma has been traditionally viewed as permanent and never changing in its essence because it accommodates structural changes. It's due to its accommodation of superficial changes that it always acts as an imperative judgment to be followed at all times. However, the anthology emphasises on the epistemological and not on

the moral aspects of Dharma. Therefore, that which is peripheral for moral philosophy in this approach becomes significant for epistemology.

Some of the essays of the anthology are remarkable and one could read them at a single stroke. The anthology is multi-disciplinary in its approach and as such a joy to find classical as well as contemporary ingredients of the concept of Dharma parallel to each other. It is not a mere collection of papers of the conference but a well documented description of contemporary Indian realities. Although one may point out the arbitrary preferences in selection of the sequence of essays as chapters, however, as such preferences are editorial prerogatives one would have to restructure the entire book in one's own way.

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Spots of Time by Manju Jaidka, Chandigarh: Graphit India 2007, pp. 227, Rs. 250, US \$15

A debut novel by an academic with an impressive oeuvre, *Spots of Time* is like a piece of music, a lyrical composition that sings of aspirations and desires, dreams and reality, fact and fantasy, in a voice that lifts it beyond maudlin sentimentality, to a brave new world. Its protagonists have a get-up-and-move-on-with-life attitude that enables them to accept achievements without euphoria and disappointments without bitterness. Vignettes of life marking the progression and regression of a stoic struggle against life's buffettings, weave in and out of biography with humour and a candour devoid of cynicism that can render life so much more bearable. Manju Jaidka, currently a professor of English at Panjab University, Chandigarh, has to her credit several critical books, journal publications, awards and fellowships including the prestigious Fulbright, Iowa and Bellagio Fellowships. Her current interest in fiction-writing is like a whiff of fresh air that saddens even as it consoles. The book's undulating rhythms, begin with an 'allegro', rise to a 'crescendo' and slowly faint into a 'de-crescendo', which acts as it's befitting and enriching denouement. Jaidka captures with sensitivity and skill, the "still sad music" of both its female protagonists caught up in the vortex of challenges that life continues to throw up with unrelenting regularity. The variegated lives and experiences of its narrator Priyadarshini Pannu a journalist, and her neighbour and alter-ego Anamika Mehra, a teacher of literature at the university, are

brought together to intersect and overlap in ways that sometimes disturb and sometimes reassure in deeply evocative ways. That Priya and Anu are interchangeable, only serves to underscore the writer's ability to bring together the private and the public, the personal and the professional, with a subtlety that enables a remarkable fusion of the energies of relation and the energies of creation. Although the book reverberates with nostalgic as well as terrifying echoes reminiscent of her domestic and academic experiences, these are articulated with an equanimity and poise that does not prevent us from living vicariously through the writer's blessings and anxieties, so that we eventually end up acknowledging with gratitude, life's small mercies.

With its evenly-paced alternating states of a rush and languor that finds natural correspondence in the changing cycles of seasons and human lives, *Spots of Time*, is bound to touch a cord in hearts and minds that have experienced life's pleasures but are nonetheless acutely aware of life's tragedies. Both, the landscape as well as the mindscape of the writer is pervaded by an acute sense of the teeming, pulsating rhythms of life as she encounters it in her private and professional reality and imagination. Mountview Vihar is the vibrant canvass of men and women, spring and summer, flowering blossoms and dead leaves, children, birds, bees, dogs and monkeys too, that dwell in Anu's 'Twitter House'. Mountview Vihar is her Wessex so to say, the reality round which she spins the web of her witty, humorous, compassionate, restrained, lonely and imaginative meanderings. That the author has a passion for poetry is evident not only from the rich sprinkling of verse in the novel, but also from the appropriately designed cover and the poetic "Prologue to Nandi" with its intimacy and distance, which sets the mood, the tenor and the tone of the novel itself. One anticipates a narrative that binds together:

"the little moments of happiness, 'spots of time' that Wordsworth wrote about, which stand out in memory. Serendipitous discoveries that give the world a different hue. That linger on in the memory like little candles. Candles that light up this humdrum world" (57).

And this is what *Spots of Time* is all about. It is a record of the import of closely observed incidents, of keenly felt moments, of thoughtless comments, of innocuous incidents and of the uncanny ways life has of pushing one into pits planned for others, which is, ironically enough, only understood in retrospect. The novel is reflective of a consciousness which has experienced, deliberated on and come to some understanding of life's subtle ironies.

The highpoint of the writer's creativity however, is

witnessed in the partly real, partly phantasmagoric and partly epiphanic intensity of the Bellagio sonata, inspired and conceived during the author's month-long stay in Bellagio, which Jaidka states is "about an artist seeking roots, plagued by vague memories of a previous incarnation. Part realistic, part mystical" (74). Iowa floods her memory with thoughts of a son who might have been a strapping and aspiring young engineer but is hopelessly entrapped in a time warp, a Trishanku-like state, suspended between being and nothingness. The book however, is not a dark one. It is a happy-sad one that holds out possibilities of renewal. The canvass is wide, the experience rich. Like Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Wolfe's *To The Lighthouse*, Anamika too can take the giant leap between 'A' and 'Z' with the grace and felicity of a trained trapeze artist, so that we can smile with her just as readily as we could cry silently with her. Lying alone in her single room in the Mayflower dorm of the International Centre at Iowa University, Anu chances upon small translucent stars glued to the ceiling by some previous occupant, that unexpectedly light up her gloom. She then realises that life is after all:

made up of such surprises! Surprises that come unexpectedly. Like stars. In the dark, all those little lights looked down at her from the ceiling. Each little light carrying its own message. Each like a star. A "a spot of time". An epiphanic moment suspended in the desert places of the memory. One spot and then another and another. Spots of time connected each to each, forming the sum total of one's life. Spots of time like saved files in the computer, to be retrieved at some uncertain, unexpected time in the future (217).

Jaidka is an effective story teller, one who becomes her tale and yet, like Yeat's "great-rooted blossomer", cannot be known from her tale.

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Konarka: Chariot of the Sun-God, Text by Bettina Baumer and M.A. Konishi, Photographs by Oki Morihiro, Publishers: D. K. Printworld, 2007, pp. 138 (Text 38 and photographs 103), Rs. 995/-

Many a different facet of the much celebrated Sun temple of Konarka in Orissa have received attention of scholars since the last two centuries: more recent among them being Thomas Donaldson (1985 through 1998 to 2003), K.S. Behera (1996) and Alice Boner (1972). This monograph – a coffee table production, and perhaps the

latest on the subject – is significantly different in its genre from those other works in that it is brief and authentic, unencumbered of copious details and yet containing much of relevance that any perceptive reader might like to know of the monument and works. It also offers remarkably refreshing insights on the subject and its contexts which compel attention. Of the two authors, Baumer and Konishi, the former in particular, filtering through the earlier works, offers her patently erudite interpretations, original in content and lucid in presentation. Not failing to present a glimpse of this great monument as it once stood in its prime glory, the monograph's text and illustrations succinctly encapsulate the spectacular beauty of the temple as it survives today in ruins, battered and derelict due to centuries of neglect, vandalism and natural calamities. Oki Morohito's photographs capture all this and more, offering a luxuriously visual treat.

Baumer picks up the ancient history of the temple from the *Madalapanji*, a (Jagannath) Puri temple record, describing the beginnings of its construction from CE 1246; consecration in CE 1258 twelve years after; and collapse in CE 1628, when only three of its adjuncts, the front hall (*mukhashala*), the Dance hall (*nata mandira*) and the Maha-Gayatri (also called Mayadevi) temple, survived. As for its pedigree, it is emphasized that the temple conceptualises and celebrates worship of the 'Vedic' Surya who stood for Light, Life and Time; and this too during a period when solar worship was indeed declining. Depending upon the Vedic and Puranic texts and also on the Agamic tradition, Baumer traces out the historical continuities in solar worship and mythology, and underscores their convergence in this Orissan masterpiece where Kashmir Shaivite tradition, with its sprinklings of the Agamic and Tantric overtones, helped in materialising the artistic vision in architecture and imagery, over-riding the geographical distances and cultural fabric that set the two regions apart. The evidence, adduced by Baumer, concerning the Kashmir Agamic and Tantric tradition impinging upon the Sun temple of Orissa, is of interest as the connection rests on valid evidence. Kashmir tradition of solar worship is patently apparent in its eighth century Martand temple dedicated to Sun. It is further supported, as Baumer indicates, by the *Sambapanchashika*, a Kashmir text with its solar associations, yet typifying the Trika philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. Its impact on Sun worship in Utkal region is remarkably worked out. As is well known, Samba was originally a Bhagavat hero, who, banished from the Vrishnis' fold, eventually turned into a celebrated votary of Surya.

Briefly tracing the history of Sun worship, Baumer

dwells upon the continuities of its earlier streams, including the Iranian inheritance on the iconographic features of Surya images during the Kushana times at Mathura. The details help in contextualising the relevant theological and iconographic developments in a historical perspective. Some other scholars elsewhere have pertinently shown that iconography of Surya in India partook of the Avesta's Mithraic tradition. For instance, the Kushana images of Sun as the symbol of royal authority typify their Mithraic inheritance from Iran; so do the figures of Rashnu Ranishta and Shraos, the two Mithraic demi-gods of justice and divine service figuring in the Kushana images of Surya from Mathura. In solar iconography in the Indian contexts later, they were transformed into Danda and Pingala who were supposed to punish the wrong-doers and keep a record of the deeds of men.

Similarly, The Magian influence is evinced in the portrayal of a lion instead of a horse in some of the Kushana images from Mathura. Some of these features, e.g., Shraos and Rashnu Ranishta besides lion as the accompanying figures, were lost as the solar iconography developed in time but others, specially the 'northern' apparel (*udichya vesha*) consisting of knee-high boots besides a girdle on the waist survived. The Puranas invented stories to explain away the outlandish features on the images of Surya, but historical evidence of Mithraic and Magian streams of influences on solar worship in India is not in doubt. Though solar iconography of indigenous mould is known from Surya images and reliefs from Bodhgaya, Garhwa and elsewhere, the outlandish Iranian features e.g., girdle and boots, occur on the images of Surya in Konarka. The monograph also offers glimpses of other forms of Surya images, Martanda Bhairava for instance, and many others that adorn the monument.

In sum, it is only fit to draw a distinction between Magian and Mithraic streams of Sun worship and their impact on solar worship and iconography, especially as the epigraphic evidence reveals a strongly entrenched Iranian Diaspora in India under the Kushanas. Our dependence predominantly on textual sources offers only a truncated picture of tradition primarily underscoring the legends around Samba, a Bhagavat hero, and his connections with adulation of Surya. The monograph under review, does offer brief remarks on Iranian inheritance leaving out extensive discussions, and rightly so, considering the nature of this work.

The monograph significantly attempts to draw on ancient Kashmir's *tantric* as well as the Shaivite aesthetic tradition and their impact on the Konarka temple. The details indicate connections between the Konarka images

and their evocation of the Indian theory of *Rasa* as evinced in the *shilpa* texts. In regard to the erotic figures on the temple, it adheres, unlike other explanations, to the Shastric view of the *shilpa* texts, adding that their depiction depended on a codified *yantra* that stood revealed only to the initiates of the *tantric* tradition. The interpretation appears valid as adherence to such a *yantra* in the context of the Rajarani temple of Bhubaneshwar has been remarkably underlined in one of the earlier essays by Baumer.

Konishi, the co-author, supplements the details on history and tradition of the archaeological site making a strong plea to protect and conserve Konarka, along with its temple and environs, as a world-heritage site under the aegis of the UNESCO. Above all, the monograph derives its value from its photographic documentations, which covers the different aspects of the temple: architecture, figure work in its varied variety, panoramic views of the site and so on. Among these, one may not miss the local community as it gathers even today around the temple and on the beach on festive occasions to celebrate the continuities in their faith and piety. All told, the monograph is a 'must read' addition to the existing literature on Konarka

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Lal Meri Drashti Mein / Lal Miyani Nazri by Bimla Raina, N.P. Search, New Delhi, Rs. 400/-

I have had the privilege of recently reviewing Arvind Gigoo's *The Silence Within* an English rendering of *Rishi Maleyon Meon* by Bimla Raina (Greater Kashmir, Srinagar, June 21, 2007 and *Daily Excelsior*, July 22, 2007). Naturally, as home work, I had to study all the 298 *Vaakhs* minutely. The *Vaakh* show the house wife Bimla Raina as a sort of mystic-poetess, resembling, though remotely, the world-renowned mystic poetess Lal Ded. But the book *Lal Ded Meri Dreshti Mein* mirrors a most unexpected side of Bimla Raina's personality: the scholar, the critic and a mystic to boot.

The book under review is almost like a bombshell against all that has so far been written and believed in about Lal Ded's mystical experiences and its exposition through her poetry. Not that she intends to debunk the lab laborious work done by great scholars like Grierson, Stein, J.L. Kaul, N.L. Talib, etc. She states in her introduction to her book that she holds their merit in great esteem but regrets that no scholar has attempted to go to the roots of the matter. An illusion – a false picture – of

Lal Ded's personality has thus emerged from the oral tradition that alone has been the source of her *Vaakh* and which alone has been accepted as true.

Bimla Raina's conclusions are based on her painstaking, scientifically analytical study of the Kashmiri dialect, its real state in Lal Ded's time (fourteenth century) and its evolution to the present day—even to its claim as a language. She has understood how the dialect used by Lal Ded has suffered distortions due to interpolations and eccentricities of some authors on her *Vaakh*. Right from the nineteenth century when her *Vaakh* were collected from the oral library to the present day the *Vaakh* have retained more or less the present form because of their musical appeal and because they are easy to remember. They also possess a spiritual emotional appeal.

Bimla Raina has another very strong factor to strengthen her credibility in our minds. This is her thorough familiarity with *Trika* philosophy popularly known as Kashmir Shaivism of which Lal Ded was a devout and disciplined practiser. Lal Ded's mystic vision of seeing *Shiva* and *Shakti* locked in one, was due to her yogic breath control right from the *Muladhara Chakra* to the *Shunya Chakra*. Bimla Raina has an intimate perception of all this. And she has added another dimension to this process, and that is, her explaining all this scientifically because of its relation to *nabies* – nerves and arteries. And in the book by Bimla Raina, there is an almost fool-proof internal evidence that the original words as traced by Bimla Raina correspond to the mystical experiences of Mother Lala. Bimla Raina is a linguistic archeologist, digging out fossils of words (fourteenth century) and resurrecting them to their original life. An epiphany indeed!

To illustrate my arguments let me take the readers to Bimla Ji herself. Out of 97 Lal Ded's *Vaakhs* she has recreated, let me quote from one—it being their most popular and, one on every Kashmiri's tongue (especially of Kashmiri Pandits) for its imaginative, spiritual and emotional appeal. And ironically distorted out of shape! Here it is:

Aami pana sadras nav chas laman
Kati bozi dai meon meiti diyi tar
Aamen takein poni zan shaman
Zuv chum barman gara gacheha

Or

I am towing the boat of my life
Across the ocean (of cosmos)
With untwisted thread;
Would the Lord ferry me across,

Water is oozing out of the unbaked earthen pot.
My soul is in pain to reach my Home.
Bimla Raina's Kashmiri; from the *Vaakh* is:

Aum pana so dras nabi chas lah human
Kati badh doi hani man lagi tar
Amein takein pone zan shreh haman
Zeev chuk barman par gache hah

Or

I recite the three – letter *AUM*
Through the yoga of breath control
I draw up warm breath from the *nabi* region
To go across the sea of mind
Water poured into an unbaked earthen pot
Sends it back to earth
So does the *atma* to the body

Thus *ami pana* is really *Aum pana*, *sadras* is *so dras*, *nabi* is *nabi*, *chus laman* is *lah human*, *kati bozi* is *kato bodh*, *dai meon* is *dai hani*, *meti diyi tar* is *man lagi tar*.

Similarly, *shaman* is *shreh haman*, *zuv* is *zeev*, *gar gacha ha* is *par gache ha*.

For the benefit of readers some meanings are given hereby:

Pana means breathing; *nabi* is *nabisthan*; *doi* means dualism; *man lagi tar* means to cross the sea called the mind; etc. etc.

Similarly, in another *Vaakh Kahan gav* is actually *Koh gav* and *nil vath* is *naal vath* which means pain in the heart.

I am quite conscious that Bimla Raina's interpretations are difficult to understand. To fathom the depths of her research it needs lot of patience and then to accept her conclusions it needs great moral courage. We may force her to recant but like Galileo before the Inquisition, she will utter in an aside, "Still Lalleshwari is not what you think, but what I have seen her like." For me who also wrote a book on her after three years of study way back in 1999, Bimla Raina has been a revelation. I confess my ignorance now. In fact I feel like what John Keats felt on reading Chapman's Homer. I felt like a watcher of the skies. When new planet swims into his ken.

Bimla Ji has broken new ground and projected Lal Ded and her *Vaakh* in their pristine glory. I recommend the book to all inquisitive readers.

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Without Margins, Poems by Sukrita Paul Kumar, Bibliophile South Asia in collaboration with Promilla & Co., Publishers, New Delhi & Chicago, 2005, pp. 117, Rs. 150/-

A well known poet, critic, translator and social activist, Sukrita Paul Kumar has been teaching at Zakir Husseini College, Delhi for over three decades now. Among several other prestigious assignments she has held, she has also been an honorary fellow of International Writing Programme, University of Iowa, USA, and a fellow at IIAS, Shimla. Her major critical works include *Narrating Partition; Conversations on Modernism; The New Story; Man, Woman and Androgyny* and *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times*. Apart from this, she has edited a volume of Urdu short stories from India and Pakistan titled *Mapping Memories* and co-edited *Women's Studies in India: Contours of Change*. She has also translated *Stories of Joginder Paul* (NBT).

With three collections of poems in English to her credit, namely, *Oscillations*, *Apurna* and *Folds of Silence*, Sukrita could easily be counted among the most potent, even established voices of the second generation of Indian English poets. Not only is she an accomplished poet but an equally brilliant illustrator. She wields the pen with as much felicity as she shows while using the paint brush or a pencil. Often, she illustrates her own poetry collections, which is what makes them stand out, aesthetically, at least. This is certainly true of the present collection, which has some brilliant pencil sketches and water-colour paintings, too.

Born and brought up in Kenya, Sukrita came to India as a young girl, and has been living here ever since, except occasional sojourns abroad. Consequently, search for roots and identity has become one of her perennial concerns as a poet. Later, her experience as a social activist, wherein she helped set up shelters for the homeless and also organised gender-workshops among the slum dwellers, gave a definitive ideological locus to her personal interest in the leitmotiv of 'home' and 'homelessness.'

To an extent, Sukrita's personal, social and ideological concerns are reflected very well in her recent collection, *Without Margins*. Sukrita uses the tropes of 'home' and 'exile' to set up dialectical tension, which largely constitutes the main matrix of this particular collection. Interestingly, the twin ideas of 'home' and 'homelessness' are explored from multiple viewpoints, which range from personal to political, feminist to philosophical, cultural to multicultural. This dialectics acquires a special sense of urgency, even rawness, in the last section of this collection, sub-titled 'We the Homeless,' in which Sukrita goes on to create myriad images of the 'homeless' people,

not in some vague, solipsistic way, but in real social and economic sense.

Often going beyond the subversive logic of this dialectics, Sukrita breaches the margins, exploring in the process, endless poetic possibilities of border-crossing and the attendant problems these might present. This is what makes her several forays into the surreal territory of the mind poetically charged, rich and rewarding. Her poetic landscape is swamped by memories, both personal and historical, which leave all our known notions of geopolitical or cultural boundaries, totally blurred, even irrelevant. Obliterating the parochial considerations of race, colour, religion and nationality, Sukrita has managed to create, quite successfully, the poetic cartography of a truly global citizen, as much at home in Chicago, as in the dark lanes of Delhi or in the forests of Zimbabwe.

This particular collection draws its strength and synergy from an unexpectedly broad swathe it cuts, not only in terms of ideas, themes and characterization, but also voices, tones and techniques. Offering an astounding variety of each type, Sukrita is as much at ease while meditating upon the existential problems of the 'self' or of 'others' as she is while reminiscing over the political issues like Gujarat riots, Kashmir problem or the distant Partition. Though 'memory' is one of the defining metaphors of Sukrita's poetry, it is refreshingly devoid of romantic sentimentalism or self-indulgent nostalgia. Very rarely, it turns egregiously maudlin or self-obsessive; as quite frequently, it is used for reclaiming either the personal history or the individual burden of archeology/history.

If in *Unloyal Memory*, she celebrates the failure and not the triumph of memory, as each time she looks back, she "see(s) more/but/holds something less in my hands," (p. 9) in *By-lanes of Memory*, a visit to Raj Ghat becomes a pretext, not only for the resurrection of historical but also of personal memories. Poised at an intersection of time, the poet was busy resurrecting the memories of a lost love, and growing "roots in the rocks," (p. 13), "when Gandhiji came alive" "In those silent moments." (p. 12). The interplay of history and memory is a subject Sukrita returns to, in several of her poems, such as *Cold Storage*, *The Hunt* and *Talking Aloud*.

In *Cold Storage*, the frozen memories of Partition when "History had raised its hood/flapping its forked tongue" (p. 24) begin to melt like "the bloody stream/flowing through Vaddi ma's heart" (p. 26), the moment she thinks of her grandmother who wanted to go "back to my Bathinde/to my Rano/(as) the bacchdda is due" (p. 25). *Talking Aloud* brings alive memories of loss, as she ruminates over a Pir, "A living monument" (p. 41), who

"rose/From heaps of Pythons" (p. 40) to witness "neither fences/Nor borders/But just horizons" (p. 41). Conceived in form of a 'surreal dialogue' with Chinar, this poem evocatively triggers off a host of memories hopelessly tied to the loss of humanistic Sufi tradition, which is what has put Kashmir, according to Sukrita, "Beyond the sadness of valleys." (p. 41).

The Hunt disgorges grotesque images of living, contemporary history, as painful memories of Gujarat riots are interred, that too, with haunting, almost bone-chilling effect. It's the harrowing prospect of "The foetus/with half-formed eyes/and deep wounds/Gaping from the/ripped belly of the/woman" (p. 28), waiting to avenge "those who raped their mothers" (p. 29) that leaves us completely stupefied, even benumbed. A chilling reminder of how the only way of exorcizing the demons of the Gujarat riots is to do justice by its victims, the poem awakens in us the much needed collective guilt, making us active partners in this horrible social crime.

Not only does Sukrita bring alive the contingencies of contemporary Indian history, but also a long-forgotten, though painful saga of a freedom struggle that enacted itself in a distant land of Zimbabwe. Her poem *When the Snakes Came for Shelter* deconstructs this national narrative from the standpoint of a little known woman soldier, Sunungukai, who fought shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts, only to be rewarded with rape, not by the enemy soldiers, but by her own, which, ironically, is the price she pays for freedom. Though localized both in time and space, the poem gains a universal edge through a rare poignancy with which it voices the mute, voiceless suffering of the women, the world over.

Whether it is the silent suffering of women on the home turf, in Gujarat or Kashmir, or that of a woman soldier in distant Zimbabwe, Sukrita's feverish, almost frenzied poetic imagination manages to capture it all, with rare vividness and inwardness of expression. As a poet, she is deeply aware of her own position as a woman, as much as she is of inflictions of other women in the male-centered, patriarchal societies in the rest of the world. Admittedly, she responds to her moment and milieu with the consciousness of a self-aware feminist, and her feminist concerns are as much sociological and political as they are existential and philosophical.

One of its most potent articulations is to be seen in the way in which Sukrita explores multiple dimensions of the paradigmatic 'mother-daughter' relationship in several of her poems. *Mothers and Daughters*, *History*, *Generation Gap*, *Bane of Knowledge*, *Crossing Over*, *Rearing* and *Of New Lives* are some of the poems that focus on many facets of this relationship, so central to the understanding of a woman's psyche as well as her

identity. While most of these poems deal with the rites-of-the-passage of daughters from childhood to adulthood, the treatment varies and so does the temporal-spatial framework. In *Mothers and Daughters*, a mother discovers her child "journeying into adolescence" on noticing a subtle shift in her sartorial preferences; her rejection of "frilly skirt" in favour of "new forms" in which her body "twists and turns." (p. 31).

Interestingly, the story of three generations dovetails into a single moment of recognition that "all the three shadows are/alike/and the umbilical cord/unsevered." (p. 32). However, this should not be seen as an act of refusal on part of Sukrita to impart a concrete, recognizable, temporal-spatial identity to her women characters, as here she is only bemoaning the fact that despite other social/cultural changes, the women, woefully enough, continue to exist as 'shadowy' figures in the popular social and cultural male mindset. Sometimes, it's a sudden revelation, exploding into her consciousness, about "my daughter/is/my history," as in *History*, that gives her an eternal understanding of how "I know now,/my mother." (p. 33). And sometimes, the distance of age dissolves into a realisation that both the mother and daughter have "So many selves," "Dancing in the myriad/Mirrors, each morning," as in case of *Generation Gap*.

If *Connections* is about the yearning of a daughter "sleepwalking/on the earth" (p. 50), seeking to re-establish magical, somewhat surreal, connections with her 'dead' mother through the "moon and stars," *Crossing Over* is about the celebration of this relationship in its absolutized, almost crystallized form. In this poem, mother and daughter constitute "A nameless universe," a la John Donne, with "humanity swarming" "Behind us," "yet again/slapping boundaries." (p. 56). *Parting Again* dramatises the eternal conflict arising from 'separation anxiety,' the trauma of physical separation from a daughter, which is compared to the act of pushing her out of the womb 'your own home,' a ritualistic re-enactment of the child-birth. But this agony finally culminates into a stoic acceptance of the fact that "self, identity and/sadness" (p. 61) are inextricably linked to each other. Occasionally, one is thrown completely off-balance, especially when the traditional roles are suddenly reversed as in *Of New Lives*, where "It's the daughter giving/Birth to a new mother/A mother-fledgling fluttering for/Fresh skies and new grounds." (p. 73). There is no shade of this relationship for which Sukrita hasn't found a befitting 'poetic metaphor.'

In the context of Sukrita's poetry, the twin, interrelated notions of 'home' and 'homelessness' acquire a new sense of urgency, even layers of meaning and signification.

'Home' is sometimes a 'womb,' sometimes a bounded, physical space, and sometimes, an extended poetic space, 'without margins.' In fact, it is this dialectics of 'home' and 'homelessness,' with its overarching design in this collection that provides Sukrita the ultimate rationale for the final section, *We the Homeless*. Somewhere, she sees the possibility of crossing over the social and economic boundaries, and asserting a common bond, a sense of solidarity among the bourgeoisie women and the slum dwellers. It is this sense of recognition that imparts to the last section, a rare inwardness, even authenticity, especially the way in which several images of 'homelessness' are incarnated.

Sukrita's poems resonate with an irrepressible desire of women for a 'home,' but also capture, with equal poignancy, the perpetual trauma of every woman, her eternal fear of being rendered 'homeless.' Whether it is the exclusion of a poor girl, "Precious Little Lila," from the "heavily carpeted/and curtained world" (p. 68) or "All those iron bridges" a father built involuntarily with his own daughter, in a paradoxically titled poem, *Is Not, But Is*, or a beggar boy at the *Traffic Signals*, whose "corpse rises for his biryani/each day" (p. 59), 'homelessness' acquires as many shades in Sukrita's poetry as are the characters or situations presented.

Ageing in America is a poignant poem about the excruciating loneliness of an old woman, who was born in Iowa but has spent the better part of her life in Chicago. Now at this stage, bereft of home, she waits at the bus stand, "for someone/to take her home/where she was born." In *Arrival*, "amidst the buzz of/alien coffee percolators" there is a strange reaching out between two "Indians in exile," "he with his crown of feathers/I with the perfect round/teeka on my forehead." (p. 18). The poetic resolution of this 'dialectics' of 'home' and 'homelessness' comes through finally in form of a "homeland" that is "horizon" "where all Indians go/after they die." (p. 19). Sukrita's contention is that in a multicultural society, 'home' is not 'the enigma of arrival,' but a brief interlude between past and present, an imaginative space for meeting of the minds.

Though *Laila's Call* is another of her feminist poems, it is also vaguely reminiscent of Amrita Pritam's well-known poem, *Aj Akhan Waris Shah Noo*. In a way, both the poems invoke the authority of Sufi poets, and search tirelessly for the poetic metaphors, appropriate to our times. In both the poems, incidentally, the notion of tradition is not fixed but dynamic, providing an occasion for re-interpreting tradition, afresh. Though "stuck forever on the potter's wheel," Sukrita's Laila is not a self-sacrificing but a recriminatory woman, who attributes all her suffering to Majnu's "wish for

immortality." Across the linguistic divide, both the poets seem to be suggesting that reclaiming Sufi tradition is not so much of a choice as a contingent necessity, perhaps the only way of negotiating the oppressive reality that surrounds us.

Though *Laila's Call* is, otherwise, a well crafted poem, it is marred by minor strokes of redundancy such as in "If only you could come out/Step out of your mystical yearnings..." Though redundancy has largely been used here as a 'poetic concession' to 'internal rhyme,' it does slacken poet's hold over both expression and material, albeit temporarily. However, Sukrita remains in a commanding position most of the time, exercising utmost control and restraint over her material as well as expression. At this point, I would also like to point out some minor flaws, surfacing in form of typographical errors, which prove quite exasperating, especially since the book is, otherwise, so well-produced. The order of words on page 22 is all jumbled up, as this line "today/on the day my of burial" clearly establishes.

Of course, these occasional lapses are more than offset by Sukrita's freshness of approach and style, even the unexpected twist of metaphor or image that surprises as much as it intrigues. In her poem on Gandhi, she says: "Never so present as now/A glassy presence/Streaming through tears/I become the tunnel/For the pilgrim to pass through." The irrepressible longing to return to Kenya stands irresistibly interrogated, when she exclaims, "What if I go back/To my mother-Africa/Not your grandmother/What if the continent of Darkness/Spreads between us." *First Love* leaves us wonderstruck by virtue of such profound poetic utterances as "That which remains most/Is what leaves us." (p. 23). Such crystallization of thought and its meticulous expression is what often accounts for the durability of Sukrita's poetry.

The eclecticism of Sukrita's poetry is also visible in the kind of influences she seems to have imbibed and internalised. If on the one hand, she shows discernible influence of Amrita Pritam, a Punjabi poet; on the other, she shows an equally strong propensity to internalize the poetic rhythms of the European modernist masters like Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot. Occasionally, her poetic utterances tend to acquire the same kind of incantatory rhythm that Eliot was so famous for. Reading *Arrival*, a poem about poet's fortuitous encounter with an Indian American or rather 'his portrait' has the same kind of reverberations that Eliot's *Portrait of a Lady* often sets off. In terms of its passivity, inertia and lassitude, its exotic though disingenuous ambience and its well-structured, cadenced build up of the situation; this poem is somewhat reminiscent of Eliot's poem. In both the poems, it's the

mise-en-scene that takes on the role of a living character, driving home to us depersonalisation of the situation involved.

It is noteworthy that the heavy dose of modernism is reflected not only in Sukrita's choice of poetic idiom and ideology, but also in her preference for progressive, modernist temper. That's why, perhaps, her efforts to break free of the modernist concerns and enter into structural and thematic tensions of the post-modern, post-colonial world create a kind of 'schism,' which could be said to define the main problematic of her poetry, too. Structured around the tension between the modernist longing for humanism and anti-humanist concerns resulting from post-modernism, her collection shows both range and sweep, which is, indeed, as impressive as it is heartening.

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Gender and Caste in the Anglophone Indian Novels of Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan: Feminist Issues in Cross-Cultural Perspectives, Antonia Navarro-Tejero, 2005, pp. 172, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, United States.

Perhaps there are many exceptionally good critical works on Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, quite easily available, especially from a cross cultural perspective, but there could be only a few like Antonia Navarro-Tejero's cross-cultural feminist critical study written in a direct, self explicatory, jargon-free and a no-nonsense albeit sufficiently serious academic style. Antonia Navarro-Tejero is a Spanish scholar who has traveled across borders and interrogated the Indian experience almost directly, without the interference of any impeding language or culture.

Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan are both writers of distinction from India who masterfully wield the English language to voice their social and political discontent. They "represent two of the many faces of the rich and complex life of feminism in India" (From the Preface by Susie Tharu). Their themes and ideological concerns are certainly different and distinct. It is to the advantage of this critic from Spain that she has been able to see the differences between both these women writers and approach them from non-essentialist and non-normative positions. The cultural and class differences of these two creative writers, and the characters that they have created, as well as the ambience that they have depicted in their literary works, do certainly call for an intimate and closer perusal in a subtle manner: one cannot

make sweeping generalisations in terms of feminist movements or feminist ideologies. Antonia Navarro Tejero does not indulge in either of these – her critical approach is marked by a fine sense of perception of cultural, linguistic and socio-political difference. Indian writing in English represents but a very small percentage of the massive literary output from India and sometimes in comparison with the regional writing, the writer in English appears to be essentially middle class and non-representative of the massive cultural plethora that constitutes the Indian experience. This notwithstanding, the two writers in English from India have been able to chart out a separate space for themselves in presenting carefully worked out portraits of some notable women characters, and also problematise the position of women in the Indian context, which is complicated by the system of values patriarchally generated and maintained. Hence notions of class, race, gender coloniality and language need to be brought into play to give depth to the study. Antonia Navarro-Tejero writes:

To invent a fair and unbiased representative literary context, which includes women as outstanding writers, it is essential to dismantle the widespread and deeply held convictions about the state and religion, and to reassemble the social institutions and practices that give expression to them. This task extends from the breaking down of patriarchal separation of the private and the public, to a revision of the conceptions about individuality and gendered identities. In a postcolonial nation like India, the task is complicated by the necessity to understand and to deal with the specific cultural politics. (pp.1-2).

The major focus of her study is the analysis of caste and gender in Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1982) and Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1970). Antonia Navarro-Tejero seeks to unravel and analyse the similar and different ways in which both these story tellers try to define or redefine female subjectivity in the face of question of caste and gender.

The book is divided into six chapters beginning with an enquiry into the role and position of women's studies in India, closely examining the rise and development of gender theories and linking it up with the social process interrogating female subjectivity, childhood, adolescence,

adulthood, and institutions of marriage and caste subordination as well, before concluding on the possibilities of liberation and independence of the woman in India. The author's commitment to and involvement in these issues cannot be underestimated. The texts and contexts in which the writers evolve are redefined in terms of socio political positioning. The critic points out: 'Roy and Hariharan are not demagogic or prescriptive, but offer alternatives instead of victimizing the oppressed. [They offer] an eclectic blend of fantasy, memoir and reality' (p.19). It is in such perceptive and perspicacious positioning, free from ideological edifices and clumsy theoretical appendages that Antonia Navarro-Tejero shows her refined critical acumen.

Most often a common stumbling block that critics armed with feminist theories encounter is, of course, the non-recognition of those distinct cultural and historical differences that inform the development of women's studies in the West and in India. Blind to these distinctions they sometimes inadvertently graft Western ideologies and issues on to Indian literary and artistic works, resorting to those as tools of enquiry and yardsticks of evaluation. Antonia Navarro-Tejero could be said to be free from such insensitivity: in her own elegant way she perceives these differences and strategically and systematically interrogates the authors.

If we need to analyse one's position in a religion, we also need to be aware of the way in which religious differences are being utilised and mobilised for many reasons by many people in power and by the state. Class, caste, regional, gender divisions that are changing and historically specific reveal that these entities are as constructed as is the nationalist history of India. Hariharan's is not a narrative of stereotypes and neither is Roy's. So one has to be clear as to which particular tradition one has in mind. (p.81)

Antonia Navarro-Tejero's succinct but interesting contribution is indeed multidisciplinary as it draws from studies in sociology, political science and history as well as cultural studies and literary theories.

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