

## BOOK REVIEW

### Return of the Native Subject

Bijoy H. Boruah

#### The Humanization of Transcendental Philosophy

by R. Sundara Rajan

New Delhi: Tulika, 1997, Rs. 350

What would it look like to a great painter, say Matisse, if he were to see his own work and himself working on the screen in slow motion? Matisse might be deeply moved by the prodigious impressions set before his eyes—impressions of the strokes of his brush leaping from one act to another, meditating in a solemn and expanding time, working through ten possible movements so as to finally crash down like a lightning stroke upon the best of all possible lines. It would appear as though Matisse had chosen, like the God of Leibniz, from amongst all the possible lines to draw the best one. He would think he had solved, in a single artistic enterprise, an immense problem. But from the standpoint of the camera, the painter's hand seems to have operated in the physical world by a perfect selective movement amidst an infinity of options.

This thought-provoking illustration is not a fabrication of imagination, but a true report given by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Sundara Rajan quotes it by way of articulating the picture of human subjectivity and intentionality as delineated by traditional philosophical theory. Merleau-Ponty is most critical of this theoretical standpoint. Matisse would be grossly mistaken were he to project his own creative standpoint into the standpoint of the camera.

#### Traditional Theory

*consciousness becomes fully subordinated to the objective pole of reality*

'The standpoint of the camera is the standpoint of traditional theory', says Sundara Rajan, 'It can make sense of the painting of a picture by a human hand only by either reducing it to a whirl of molecules or atoms, or by etherealizing it into the upsurge of radical freedom' (p.195). In other words, the camera deludes us into the belief that the human

hand performed in a manner which is accountable in accordance with either strictly deterministic laws of nature, or radically indeterministic freedom of a demigod.

The reference to the hand of the painter is an allusion to the human subject. Traditional philosophical characterization of the human subject is divided between deterministic, empirical naturalism, and indeterministic, rationalist transcendentalism. This division acquires a systematic character in the Copernican revolution of Kant's philosophy.

The Copernican revolution results in the uneasy chasm between the transcendental, world-constituting consciousness and consciousness of the empirical, psychological self. This chasm finds its sharpest formulation in the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl, in the form of the distinction between the transcendental ego and the empirical subject. For Husserl the relationship between these two subjectivities is an enigma, 'a paradoxical alliance of unity and difference.' In Sunder Rajan's reconstrual, the difficulty is that of understanding 'how human subjects can be in the world and yet at the same time be conceived as subjects for the world' (p. 9). The identification of the transcendental ego with the natural human ego within the space of a single consciousness would involve 'nothing less than the incoherence of identifying the constitution with the constituted, of the subject with the object' (p. 144).

Philosophy's encounter with this alleged enigma has understandably to be a revolutionary one. Sundara Rajan suggests a second Copernican revolution in philosophy. 'If the first Copernican turn was a movement from the world to consciousness, from the object to the subject, the second Copernican turn, without giving up the integrity and reality of consciousness and subjectivity, returns the subject in the world' (p. 174).

But this new turn is that of a total detranscendentalization of the

subject, in the manner of empiricist naturalism, whereby consciousness becomes fully subordinated to the objective pole of reality. That is, human consciousness does have a transcendental dimension, essentially reflective in character by virtue of which the human subject has a being for the world. What has to be achieved, therefore, is the reconciliation of the reflective essence of consciousness with its equally essential dimension of worldliness.

Sundara Rajan's mission takes him through a sustained critical study of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. While the need for the second revolutionary turn is demonstrated in the form of Husserl's perception of the enigma described earlier, Heidegger's idea of Dasein or Being-in-the-world is shown to be a significant step in the direction of the desired reconciliation. But it is in Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'body-subject' that the final realignment of the natural and the reflective aspects of human consciousness is accomplished.

#### The Body-subject

*we may wonder whether the concept of the body-subject actually masks the original enigma . . . the human body is held to be at once naturally grounded and intrinsically nature-transcending*

Merleau-Ponty conceives of reflection as grounded in the pre-reflective cogito, i.e., the natural subject. The expressive activity of reflective consciousness is made possible only because the subject has a natural pre-reflective life of participation in the world. The world is disclosed to consciousness in 'natural perception' as an indeterminate, given background of all determinate, judgemental cognitions. Natural perception is the primordial mode of experience wherein we are in contact with the world in the intimacy of belonging to it. This perceptual contact is thus not a perceptual encounter, but a perceptual faith which binds us to the world as to our native land, and which is the pervasive experience-source of all forms of thought and action.

When Sundara Rajan turns towards the ontological direction of the phenomenological philosophy,

the seminal concept of the life-world due to Husserl figures as the concept of the Earth. The Earth is not just the world or nature that consists of material objects in Euclidean space. Rather, it is the living ground of the subject. The subject knows the world not because it transcendently constitutes the latter but rather because it naturally belongs to it in the mode of pre-predicative and pre-reflective perceptual awareness.

Sundara Rajan characterizes this reversion of the transcendental turn as the 'humanization of consciousness, a return of the self to the world' (p.174). If the philosophical tradition from Kant to Husserl is that of transcendentalization of human consciousness, Merleau-Ponty and Sundara Rajan humanize the transcendental and thereby purport to resolve an apparent enigma. The key to this resolution is the embodied subject of perceptual consciousness.

But we may wonder whether the concept of the body-subject actually masks the original enigma. If consciousness or subjectivity is neither fully transcendental nor wholly reducible to brute matter, then surely it is a phenomenon that demands an explanation hitherto unknown. That explanation would be immensely difficult because the human body is held to be at once naturally grounded and intrinsically nature-transcending. In this reconstrual, the nature of consciousness and the subject is no less enigmatic.

While this problem has become a fervent preoccupation in the Anglo-American analytic philosophy and cognitive science, it seems to pose no real problem in the philosophical thinking of continental phenomenology. It would have been a greater philosophical gain, therefore, had Sundara Rajan elucidated the notion of the body-subject from the standpoint of cognitive science as well. There is a considerable range of work on the notion of the body as a self in recent analytic philosophy of mind that ought to have been discussed and related to the phenomenological view. It is when such key concepts are examined from both angles of contemporary Western philosophy that one might see the ray of an integrated philosophical vision.

**BIJOY H. BORUAH** teaches Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Nativism Without Resentment?

Shiva Kumar Srinivasan

*Nativism: Essays in Criticism*

Edited by Makarand Paranjape

New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi; 1997; 256 pp; Rs. 100

Ralph Waldo Emerson once declared that 'our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands draws to a close'. The United States, he felt, had 'listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe'. But, despite this declaration by New England's most celebrated intellectual, American literature continued to court the 'muses of Europe'. T.S. Eliot wanted to be known as an 'English poet who was born in America' rather than as an 'American poet domiciled in England'. Even enormous material prosperity and political power did not give the American literary establishment enough confidence to act on Emerson's words! The withdrawal symptoms that American literature displayed raises problems about the recent nativist discourse in the Indian subcontinent as well.

In America, the decline of the classics as the primary source of education in the humanities, and the subsequent rise of multicultural canons, are but recent events. And barely had such a nativist project begun when it had to be radically redefined to include the real natives of America—the native Americans and the various ethnic groups. In other words, it is difficult to speak of nativism the moment we understand that the political context of multiculturalism will militate against any particular form of nativism.

#### Nativist's Dilemma

*the nativist would like to discover that the cognitive and the experiential modes valorised in his culture are unique in a radical way*

I started by raising the very problem of nativism because the articulation of this problem, in the volume under review, might give the reader the impression that this is a difficulty specific to India. Given the plethora

of languages, literatures and cultures in this country, several complications arise when the term 'nativism' is introduced in a discussion. Who are these natives whose literary cultures we wish to preserve? Why should we insist that real Indian culture can only be found in the *bhashas*? Why should the English language pose such a fundamental threat to the likes of Balachandra Nemade and Ganesh Devy, who deserve both the credit and the blame for popularising this concept? Despite our confused experiments with modernity, can we still refuse to recognise English as one of the *bhashas*? Can the dismissive pronouncements of a Salman Rushdie on the state of writing in the *bhashas* inspire so much resentment that Indian writing in English becomes a Western conspiracy?

Though the pronouncements of Nemade and Devy have an alarmist streak about them, this volume of essays is by and large a sober exercise. The editor, Makarand Paranjape, does a delicate balancing act to ensure that both sides of the argument are aired. Not every contributor to this volume is a nativist. For most contributors, I suspect, the agenda is fairly simple: how does one come to terms with the temptations of Western critical theory that is able to suspend the real with a nonchalance that is impossible in a developing country? What, if any, are the ethical choices that must be made to foster a critical mind-set in Indian criticism? There are no simple answers to these questions.

The nativist would like to discover that the cognitive and the experiential modes valorised in his culture are unique in a radical way. Thus, nativism must function on the assumption that there must be a radical disjunction between languages and cultural paradigms. However, if cognitive studies demonstrate that there are only a handful of ways in which humans

get their thinking done, then it becomes quite trivial to say that a particular thought pattern was imported from elsewhere. Further, if nativism is concerned not so much with the modalities of cognition but only with the availability of local metaphors, then its claims can at best be parochial. Now that it is historically impossible, short of cultural genocide, to export other parochial modes in the name of the universal, the only problem left with the nativist is that his own parochial modes might have been subject to 'contamination'.

#### Cultural Hijacking

*each of the contributors to this volume can be found traversing its traumatic stretches in search of their burial land*

Contamination, as Harold Bloom once pointed out, is a form of cultural hijacking. This is probably the only way in which developing or other cultures, that are haunted by their belatedness, can handle their anxiety of influence (for example, consider the way in which Shakespeare studies have been taken over by English departments in America from their British counterparts). Otherwise, even the best educated literary critics come across as narrow-minded when they decide to search for the essential features of their cultures. For many critics who have been beneficiaries of Western education this must be traumatic. And like Oedipus' swollen leg, each of the contributors to this volume can be found traversing its traumatic stretches in search of their burial land. As Wagish Shukla points out: '*Desivad* should not mean that poets are not required to write on a grand scale ... (t)hen, and then only, you will have the great tragedies ... (b)ut how can the tragedy be confident? It knows as Oedipus did that the native land needs you only for your burial, otherwise it is exile'.

One of the contributors, for example, conducts the battle head on. Sudhir Kumar is pained at the dismissal of the idea of the nation. He believes that postcolonial theory has made it impossible to speak intelligibly on nativism, which must presuppose the availability of the nation as a category. However, post-

colonial theory is only responding to developments in international capitalism which has in fact started to erode the viability of the nation-state as a unit of economic organisation. The problem with nation-states and nationalism (and hence by implication, nativism) is that they have become uneconomical as units of economic organisation—not merely unfashionable as units of political or theoretical analysis. What Kumar's argument overlooks is that nations will not even have the ethical option of choosing between competing modes of production.

#### From Nations to Regions

*the nativist task of deconstructing the Indian tradition must be part of a greater secular and egalitarian project of constructing unity at a higher level*

What options do we have in a borderless world? It is economic regions, rather than nations, that attract capital. As Kenichi Ohmae points out: 'nation-states are eroding as economic actors ... (r)egion-states are taking shape ... (t)he only real question, then, for political leaders is whether (it) can be harnessed to provide a better life for their people. ('Putting Global Logic First', *Harvard Business Review*, Jan-Feb. 1995).

How can we market our wares in the international community of scholars such that it is not the ethics of political correctness that prompts a return to our literatures, but rather a libidinal compulsion? Nativists and postcolonial theorists should attend to the resolution of this problem. Otherwise, despite our best intentions, the very tone of the nativist arguments will be its undoing. As K. Satchidanandan points out: '[t]he nativist task of deconstructing the Indian tradition must be part of a greater secular and egalitarian project of constructing unity at a higher and more realistic conceptual level, of heteroglossia ... our project must be more future-oriented than past-oriented and in some sense postmodern rather than obscurantist'.

SHIVA KUMAR SRINIVASAN teaches English at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Evading Responsibility

Shobhana Bhattacharji

Interface of Cultural Identity and Development

edited by Baidyanath Saraswati

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.  
New Delhi: 1996; xxi + 290 pp; Rs. 600

This volume lies midway between a regular shelf-sized and a coffee table hard cover book. Its binding came apart as I read. It is ridden with typographical errors that are not evenly distributed. The Foreword and Prologue are confusingly listed in the Contents page which comes after them. The volume is the outcome of an international workshop—funded by the UNESCO and held in 1989—on 'Cross-cultural Lifestyle Studies with Multimedia Computerizable Documentation' (p. vii).

Inside its pistachio green dust covers, the book carries twenty-two essays. The authors are academics, UNESCO (written as 'Unesco') officials, and grassroots activists. They address the problem, as they see it, of the failure of 'development theories, as opposed to economic [ones]' (p. xi). These are seen to date from 'post-World War II decolonization' (p. xi).

#### A Small Matter

*contemplation of one's  
spiritual condition is  
attractive to stomachs not  
rumbling with hunger or  
infected from drinking  
filthy water*

Kapila Vatsyayan says in the preface that the world today is happier, less aggressive, more equal than it was when capitalists and communists fought it out between themselves. There is only the small matter of culture not being sufficiently important in developmental planning. 'The crisis of cultural identity' is 'closely linked with developmental issues which seem to take for granted the primacy of socio-economic man, and that, too, within the context of nation-state notions' (p. vii). Two problems strike one instantly here.

When a person does not have the money to buy his next meal, the

economics of his existence are likely to dominate his life. The editor of the volume, Baidyanath Saraswati, does not seem to agree. But when, as an alternative to the current emphasis on the material conditions of existence, he quotes the *Rg Veda* ('O God, grant us ... a mind to think and a smiling love') or the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* ('What is this? 'This is One'. 'Who is this One?' etc.), one wonders if this is an adequate substitute for food, water and shelter.

Secondly, nation states are being bashed thoughtlessly. Jingoism and chauvinism are dangerous offshoots of the nation state, but would a World Government, controlled by the US, care whether weavers in India die because cotton thread is no longer subsidized? Fashionable phrases are not a good way to deal with the real hiccups of developmental planning and execution. Bozkut Guvenc's essay, 'The Quest for Cultural Identity in Turkey,' is an example of how to get beyond rhetoric into the nitty-gritty's of historical realities.

Vatsyayan ends her foreword with the statement: '... the resource of culture and of human wisdom and understanding ... [is the] only resource shared equally [by] North and South' (p. xvii). Faced with rebellion from within an iniquitous society, Mathew Arnold—in words identical to Vatsyayan's—had offered culture as an alternative to anarchy, his term for working class movements. Some decades earlier, Methodists had told the miserable poor of new industrial cities in England to contemplate a seat in heaven rather than desire material betterment. Socialists like Marx argued, on the other hand, that material conditions are man-made and must therefore be changed by man. Contemplation of one's spiritual condition is attractive to stomachs not rumbling with hunger or infected from drinking filthy water. The rest of mankind would

like some change in its material circumstances.

But let's skip to an essay that is typical of many of the contributions. Lachman M. Khubchandani, in 'Universal and Unique in Cross-cultural Interaction: A Paradigm Shift in Developmental Ideology', enters the interface of cultural identity and development through the politics of language and supports his point with impeccable argument. But then comes his analysis of the cultural associations of 'work'. He sets up Sanskrit roots/usage of words and conceptual systems specifically against the 'everyday discourse' in English where work/action implies an 'apparent' activity and is related to an observable product with apparent benefits (mostly socio-economic). However, Sanskrit is not used in everyday discourse. So why counterpose it to English? Secondly, since Khubchandani starts by opposing hegemonic homogenization of language, why does he simply replace one kind of dominance with another?

The answer is supplied obliquely a little later: 'Different socio-cultural traits get integrated through super-consensus.... In the context of culture, the traditional concept of region, that is *kshetra*, covers a wide spectrum of linguistic variations in everyday life performance. It helps foster the feeling of oneness among diverse people in the region, creating in them a sense of collective reality....' How? In the same book, A.R. Momin's account of the traditional diversity and fragmentation of Indian culture is infinitely more convincing.

Apart from Momin and Guvenc, three contributions stand out for their worth in different ways.

#### Finer Tradition

*what appropriate technology  
could mean for tribesmen  
whose life is no longer 'a  
going concern' nor is  
there an adequate  
understanding of  
their lifestyle*

B.D. Sharma's 'Taming Structural Transformation' is in the fine tradition of polemical discourse, expressing the anger of an activist about the exploitative nature of industrialization. Basing his argument on the experience of the people of Mavalibhata in Bastar who

resisted a centralized and insensitive developmental project, Sharma points out how developmentalists in India have used loopholes in the Constitution to evade its directive principles; how equity has been 'relegated to a subsidiary position' (p. 255). His passionate involvement and experience are very different from those of the authors of the opening essays who seem to suggest that if Planning Commission recited the Upanishads, amazing sorts of social justice would occur.

Bunker Roy makes a similar point about local resistance to development of a certain kind. Solar energy in five villages around Tilonia in Rajasthan was a miracle for the community users. 'But virtually everyone else [was] unhappy...' (p. 284). Why? Because over one million Pound sterling was being spent every year by the government to carry 200,000 liter of kerosene to these villages by road transport. Imagine how many contractors would suffer if the whole region was solar electrified!

Although it would have been useful to have some material on the rip off that many NGOs have now become, Roy's and Sharma's essays are far superior to the silly verbiage that fills this book.

In 'Identity, Tribesmen and Development', Mrinal Miri combines academic rigour with plain good sense. Avoiding sentiment, he ends his essay by looking at what appropriate technology could mean for tribesmen whose life is no longer 'a going concern' nor is there an adequate understanding of their lifestyle. It could mean a slower, less traumatic pace of change so that the tribesman arrives 'there' in one piece. Or it could mean 'something that will not only help to preserve the tribesman's life but also enhance and enrich it'. He opposes the doctrinaire in favour of the 'lived' (pp. 77-79).

So, should one read this book? Probably yes. It clarifies much. But it is also an example of how thinkers can dodge serious involvement with issues of food, housing and livelihood; how words can be used to pretend one is thinking when one is being merely self-indulgent; how lots of money can be spent to achieve little.

SHOBHANA BHATTACHARJI teaches English at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Levels of Prejudice

Rabindra Ray

Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India

by T.N. Madan

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; 323 pp + glossary, references and index

This book is a topical and welcome contribution to Indian sociology. It aims to contribute to the understanding of what it believes are general, universal sociological categories of secularism and fundamentalism and thus seems to have no overt argument — a rhetorical posture belied by the polemical title. (Without this argument the contribution that the book makes to the understanding of secularism and fundamentalism in India cannot be addressed.) The argument itself moves at two levels: an overt level at which it is an exploration of the notions of secularism and fundamentalism in a highly schematic, selective and prejudiced fashion, and a covert organic level at which the prejudices are set into their Indian context. The two levels, however, interpenetrate each other and contribute greatly to the interest an Indian reader is likely to take in the book in trying to decipher the author's viewpoint.

#### Crisis of Secularism

*the pure notional form of a clear separation of religion from other spheres of life, especially politics, is nowhere to be found — not even in Europe and America*

The overt argument begins with the misgivings that have begun to be voiced in the West concerning the validity of the notion of secularism. The author sketches the European pedigree of the term. He identifies it with the open-minded and critical outlook of Enlightenment, but without going into questions of the atheist, materialist content of the term: questions that are highly important in what the author calls the crisis of secularism. To begin with, there is the sociological rather than the social dimension of this crisis: the pure notional form of a

clear separation of religion from other spheres of life, especially politics, is nowhere to be found — not even in Europe and America. Everywhere, we see only differences of degree in the mixture of religious considerations in various spheres in public life. The author regards this as his theoretical opportunity and of supreme interest to Indian sociology: the study of India can illuminate the workings of such categories in a way as to be valid for the whole world.

But this overt argument and the notional crisis are tied to a deeper and less explicitly pronounced social crisis of the workings of secularism in India. This is a theme that the author has already explored in the past and the conclusions of which he has drawn upon to elaborate the perspective of the present book. He believes that the secularism of the Indian constitution has two components. One is the Europeanized secularism of the intellectuals—socialist in inspiration in the case of Nehru — that wishes to clearly separate religion from public life and that has tried to impose itself on the masses. The author seems opposed to such imposition, but also argues for the independent validity of this point of view in a democracy, indeed its superiority as the more rational, open-minded view. However, this secularism—the 'secularism in crisis' that finds itself unable to cope with the closed-mindedness of the communalism and fundamentalism of the masses—is not the active agency of the relations between different religious groups. Religious groups in India maintain relations with each other not according to principles of a Europeanized secularism, but in accordance with world-views where religion has a preeminent place in public life. The coexistence in peace of religious communities, which also perhaps is a variety of secularism, is thus the outcome of an exclusivist tolerance or an accommodative non-interference. These latter secularisms are currently in crisis because of the rise of fundamentalism.

#### Invariant Principles

Whereas the author's conceptions of secularism and its crisis are organically historical and sociological, his programme for an understanding of fundamentalisms is schematic and formal. His historical account is selective, and from it he wishes to deduce invariant principles for the identification and the characterization of fundamentalism. Thus, to my mind, the author can erroneously characterize the phenomenon of Hindutva as a fundamentalism.

The book, however, has more to offer than this argument. It undertakes a presentation of certain thinkers in the Sikh, Islamic and Hindu traditions as its mode of exposition and covers a great deal of ground in the consideration of doctrinal matters. The selection of thinkers and doctrines seems to have been guided with an eye to illuminating contemporary Indian circumstances. The author points out the terror of the enviroing Hindu circumstance and its contamination in the cases of the Sikh and earlier Muslim fundamentalism, touching only briefly on the anti-westernism of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. No causative nexus is even mentioned or indicated to attribute motives to a Hindutva. Equally, atheism and materialism are left entirely undiscussed, without which it may not be possible to address the phenomenon of the crisis of secularism and fundamentalism.

An engaging and exciting book. But a word of caution. Ram Mohun Roy's 'Attiyo Sabha' has been mis-cited as 'Brahmo Sabha' and the references include two *Brahmanas* and the *Mahabharata* without bibliographical information, even though the author says he has used English translations of Sanskrit texts.

RABINDRA RAY teaches at the Delhi

## LECTURE

### Partition Stories

Narendra Mohan, a visiting professor at the IAS in April-May 1998, presented a series of three lectures on *Partition: The Indian Short Story*. The first lecture, *Partition: History and Memory*, dealt with the role and significance of memory, as reflected in literature, for bridging the gaps in history. Recalling the days he spent in Lahore, Narendra Mohan shared with the audience his vivid memories of the traumatic experiences which he and the members of his family had to undergo at the time of partition. He emphasized that literature can serve as a vehicle for interpreting the events of history afresh. He referred in particular to 'Pattar Anara De' (A. Hamid), 'Parmesher Singh' (Ahmed Nidim Kashami), 'Malbe ka Malik' (Mohan Rakesh) and 'Sikka Badal Gaya' (Krishna Sobti).

In his second lecture, *Partition: A Literary Text*, he pointed out that the socio-cultural as well as political problems of the day are part of the literary texts concerning partition. He dealt with a wide range of short stories such as: 'Maan Beta' (Hyat-Ullah Ansari), 'Patjhar Ki Aawaj' (Qurrat-ul-ain Hyder), 'Ek Shehari Pakistan Ka' (Ram Lal), 'Kis Ka Itihaas' (Rajee Seth), 'Aadab' (Samaresh Basu), 'Lajwanti' (Rajendra Singh Bedi), 'Uttar Nahin Milaya' (Niranjan Tasneem), 'Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai' (Bhisham Sahni) and others. These stories mostly concern people marginalized by the society.

The third lecture, *Partition: Blotted Sunshine*, highlighted the fallout of the historic divide that created vacuity in the lives of people across the borders. Analysing at length the short stories of renowned Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, he came to the conclusion that these are, in a way, long drawnout cries in the wilderness of partition. Manto's short stories, particularly 'Khol Do', 'Thanda Gosht' and 'Nangi Aawazen', laid stress not only on the episodes but also depicted the deep-rooted psyche of the affected persons. He also referred to Krishna Sobti's 'Mere Maan Kahan', Kamleshwar's 'Kitne Pakistan', Munir Ahmed Sheikh's 'Apni Shaklen', Manoj Basu's 'Seemanta' and Joginder Paul's 'Fakhtayen'.

PANKAJ K. SINGH

## BOOK REVIEW

### Technobrats and Artsy Aunty

Indivar Kamtekar

Technobrat: Culture in a Cybernetic Classroom

by Rukmini Bhaya Nair

New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India; 1997; 313 pp; Rs. 395

Rukmini Bhaya Nair, professor in the Humanities Department at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi, recently taught a course on 'Culture and Technology'. Forty-two males and three females, aged about nineteen or twenty, made up her class. The proceedings of the classroom (or the sunny lawns of the IIT, where the classes were held in winter), make up the 313 pages of this book. We can read, quoted often *in extenso*, the remarks of the teacher, the responses of her students, the questions set for exams, the students' answer scripts, and even some of their class notes.

#### *The Mind of the Engineer*

*culture, according to the technobrats, has nothing (yes, nothing) to do with the 'froth and lure' of the arts; it is more about being socially accepted.*

Our author is 'in quest of the elusive soul of the engineer' (p.188). Elsewhere in the book we are informed that it is about the behaviour of engineers (p. 289), and (more alarmingly) about the 'anatomy of that rarely studied species' (p. 215). According to Nair IIT students are worth prolonged observation, because they are highly rated products of their culture, and because they are inevitably destined to be leaders of the future, whether as technocrats or captains of industry. They represent the 'acme of middle class India'.

Have no fear that this investigation will be dull or conventional. At the outset we are told to expect an 'interactive' volume, 'a book that has the structure of a maze, a maze that itself has no centre' (p.5). The text turns out to be idiosyncratically garnished with references to: the *Rig Veda*, Aristotle, Barthes, Habermas, Heidegger, Lyotard, Wittgenstein, Ajanta and Lucknow's Bara Imambara. There are quotations from

Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore, and *Time* magazine. Sub-headings, too, have a flavour to savour: 'Epithymetics, A New Branch of Philosophy' follows 'According to Ramnik, Deep Discussion Yar' (pp.124-5). Like a computer famous in science fiction, the IIT class pondered the meaning of 'Life, the Universe, and Everything'. There was time for the Narmada Dam Project and there was time for Near Death Experiences. Initially reticent, the technobrats soon became voluble. The author prioritizes (do not confuse with valorizes) their voices. Outcome: A little monotony, but much sweet polyphony.

What sorts of characters emerge from these pages? A determinedly unconventional format leads to surprisingly conventional descriptions. The IITians on display here possess a stern work ethic and study prodigiously hard. Not, you understand, out of any desire for knowledge, but because they are competitive animals, obsessed by marks and grades. They are achievers, on autopilot for success. They have a penchant for numbers and measurement. Success in the IIT lexicon simply means money and consumer goods. Such success requires students to be focused: wedded only to success, with no thought of bigamy. Forgive me for saying this, but their anthem might well begin: No time for LSR or LSD, or to dream of Juhi or Madhuri...

There is no time to read books either. Culture, according to the technobrats, has nothing (yes, nothing) to do with the 'froth and lure' of the arts; it is more about being socially accepted. *Time* magazine is staple reading. Almost none of Nair's class had heard of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*; none had read it. One of the students memorably described the attitude of those around him as: 'Gandhi is dead, we are not!' (p. 101).

Most IITians will not work with machines, nor will they remain in India. Committed to money rather than technology, they see their future

as managerial rather than mechanical. They are modern mercenaries, eager to sell their skills wherever the rewards are greatest. Consequently, 'The presence of America haunts the IIT classroom' (p.242). The issues of *Time* magazine therefore provide an essential diet. Nair tells us that 'The postcolonial technologist is a natural migrant' (p.175). Most IIT products aspire to careers in America, for which they depart as soon as they possibly can. Green pastures are where green cards are.

The IITian is suffused with a sense of innate superiority. Any person who 'hasn't made it', or who has fared less well, deserves contempt. Females, for example. 'Women shouldn't complain. If they were as good as men, they'd do as well' (p.210). Forget about losers. IITians agree that a socially committed engineer is an anomaly. Each one is for himself in this world.

#### Portrait or Caricature?

*does the flower of our nation's youth really require a megadose of Viagra? Rukmini Nair's camera may just not be candid enough*

Despite the pyrotechnics, this book ends up promoting a familiar stereotype. The IITian presented here is, for the most part, a smug, selfish, conservative and mercenary creature. He seldom agonizes. He is brilliant and will be successful. He salivates, with Pavlovian alacrity, on hearing the sound of the examination bell. 'The engineer/technologist is a strange centaur-like creature, half-human, half-machine' (p.8).

Is this a convincing portrait, or is it a caricature? No vulgar sociological data pollute the pages of *Technobrat*. At the end of the book our knowledge remains hazy on what sort of background the technobrats have come from, where precisely they go, and how well they actually perform. We are to take it for granted that the IITian is a middle-class genius destined for success in America, and that is that. We are invited to share a tone towards the technobrat which is (despite the title of the book) oddly reverential. He is the acme of modern India, not (perish the thought!) the acme of modern India.

*we have been presented with an implausible stereotype. Nevertheless, the witty and versatile Rukmini Nair clearly provided her students with an unusual experience*

Nair recalls the encouragement of Noam Chomsky, and thanks Ashis Nandy for reading the 'mammoth first draft' of her book. These are impressive credentials. Consider, however, that there might be more to the IIT kids than they displayed on the stage of *HU484: Culture and Technology*. Does the flower of our nation's youth really require a megadose of Viagra? Rukmini Nair's camera may just not be candid enough. No doubt she promises a glimpse of the 'inner world of engineers', no doubt she prioritizes student voices, but maybe it doesn't normally take the average technobrat till p.303 to say 'fuck' for the first time. No doubt some technobrats sing 'Welcome to the Hotel California', but SPICMACAY also had roots in the Delhi IIT.

So maybe IIT students' lives are culturally richer, their perplexities greater, and their trajectories more varied. We have been presented with an implausible stereotype. Nevertheless, the witty and versatile Rukmini Nair clearly provided her students with an unusual experience, which HarperCollins have preserved for posterity, and made available to us in the meantime.

What did the students of *HU484* think of the humanities? For a clue, imagine forty-five brows furrowed in thought, framing judicious answers to one of Nair's exam questions:

In Hindu iconography, the mother goddess Durga is often pictured as ten-armed...if you were to place two current technological inventions in Durga's hands (for example: a mixi or a computer or an atomic bomb), which two objects would you choose, and how would you explain to Durga their usefulness? Could you persuade her to discard or substitute some of the objects she has been holding on to for such a long time? (pp. 255-56)

And if you want to know their answers, read the book!

INDIVAR KAMTEKAR is a Fellow of IIAS, Shimla.

## BOOK REVIEW

### The Underbelly of Progress

Jaidev

**Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi**

edited and introduced by Maitreya Ghatak

Calcutta: Seagull, 1997; xxxix + 219 pp; Rs. 275

*She demystifies our land reforms, tribal welfare schemes, SC/ST reservations, emancipation of bonded labour, and progressive policies—in short, our independence and decolonization*

Made up of 24 of Mahasweta Devi's 'activist' essays, *Dust on the Road* is a chargesheet against the Great Indian Tradition and the Great India. Mahasweta produces concrete evidence, names specific victims, specific oppressors and their specific practices, and spares no party or regime.

Of course, the facts which Mahasweta presents relate only to a 'certain percentage' of Indians, those who are routinely brushed away as mere pimples on the fair face of Mother India. For Mahasweta, they are the 'real India', their slavery sufficient proof that the war of independence is still to be fought and won.

#### Shocking Facts

*the cadres of political parties know what goes on in the fortress-like kilns, but these slaves are neither Bengali nor a vote bank*

So studded with shocking facts is *Dust on the Road* that no review of this size can even hint at their kinds or range. I shall only pick up a few patterns of exploitation underlying these facts, patterns which, in spite of local variations, have a pan-Indian character. Indeed, the most disturbing aspect of Mahasweta Devi's writing is that it demonstrates beyond doubt that what we do not choose to see often implicates us all. She demystifies our land reforms, tribal welfare schemes, SC/ST reservations, emancipation of bonded labour, and progressive policies—in short, our independence and decolonization. These have all been 'planned strategies' to fool both

the world outside and those sections within India whom the entire structural logic of our development is determined to cut off from 'her India'.

In Palamau, Bihar, which to Mahasweta is both a vast crematorium and 'a mirror of true India', some 200,000 human beings are condemned, generation after generation, to live and die in hideous bondage, often for ridiculously small sums borrowed once upon a time by some ancestors of theirs. A high-profile *bandhua*-emancipation scheme is launched, only to render them worse off than before. If some of them turn to the city, they fall into the clutches of city-based contractors and their comprehensive network. As for the womenfolk left behind, atrocities often force them to escape into the forest. During the monsoons, brick-kiln *munshis* and elderly female *sardars* (ex-concubines of the kiln owners now employed as labour-suppliers) swarm the Jharkhand countryside, to lure young women with promises of fantastic jobs and food in Calcutta. Once there, the women are wholly cut off from the world outside and are made to work fourteen hours a day, loading and unloading bricks, with no leave, no medical facilities, no minimum wages. Their job also involves satisfying the lust of the owners, their *munshis*, *mastans*, and truck-drivers. The cadres of political parties know what goes on in the fortress-like kilns, but these slaves are neither Bengali nor a vote bank.

*Dust on the Road* is a veritable discovery of India, her incredible engines of torture and exploitation. In West Bengal, while legally no tribal land can be bought by non-tribals, tea-plantation and brick-kiln owners flout the law with perfect ease. In Jharkhand, the land belong-

ing to the poor, tribal or non-tribal, is smoothly recorded as a 'gift' to industrialists or else transferred in the names of imaginary tribals. The woman who spends her entire day gathering *kendu* leaves receives just a rupee although the contractor makes four hundred rupees for the same collection. The natural forests, the lifeline of the poor, are plundered by contractors, and the blame is passed on to the uncivilized tribals. The natural forest gone, deadly eucalyptus invades the scene.

If protest builds against the *dikhus* in Jharkhand, the victims are declared secessionists. If the Santhals demand official recognition of their language, which has more speakers than Sindhi or Kashmiri, a foreign hand is seen behind them. The Mundas, Hos and Sabars have a glorious history of anti-British rebellions, and yet the mainstream feels outraged if a demand is raised for the inclusion of their heroes in the history of India's freedom struggle. The upper castes sound so martyred when they refer to the government's 'pampered children' and the reservation of jobs and seats for them. In truth, the SC/ST candidates are often 'not found suitable' even as forest guards or village school teachers. Most of the schools in tribal belts get non-tribal teachers who have better things to do than teach the brutes. For a vast majority of educated SC/ST candidates, 'the call never comes'. So that Chuni Kotal, the first Lodha female graduate, was pushed into suicide by her teachers. The enquiry report found all her allegations true but concluded that she had killed herself for 'personal reasons'.

#### A Redeeming Praxis?

*Mahasweta is pleading for an early death of the Great India, which is only an extension of Bihar, so that the real India, its culture and life patterns have a chance to save us all*

'I was 21 in 1947', says Mahasweta. 'With many others, I tried to believe that India's independence would not totally fail the poor of the country. In 1984 I can say that for the poor of India, national independence, with its many plans, programmes, projects and acts in

parliament, [has] come to nothing.' Nothing since 1984 has happened to alleviate her gloom. The number of *bandhuas* has kept increasing; they are now being supplied to Punjab and Haryana, too. Some 70 per cent of Indians see only a death sentence for them in the eyes of Bharat: the massive amounts spent year after year, avowedly in their name, are actually spent to fatten a tribe of hereditary relief-grabbers which has consolidated itself around pools of human misery.

In an IAS seminar in 1988, Arvind Das argued that there could be a life for Bihar without Jharkhand; only, a new life would require the death of its colonial-feudal mindset, its parasitical practices, its luxury of uneconomic land-ownership patterns. In *Dust on the Road*, Mahasweta is pleading for an early death of the Great India, which is only an extension of Bihar, so that the real India, its culture and life patterns have a chance to save us all:

What is the definition of civilization? In tribal societies, traditionally there is no dowry, no *sati*; divorce and widow remarriage are sanctioned, no child is an orphan even if he or she loses both the parents — the neighbours will rear the child and look after it... [Yet] the mainstream considers them uncivilized (p. 157).

Yet Mahasweta believes that India can still mature and be civilized. This is due to her conviction that the poor, for all their illiteracy and degradation, are neither uncivilized nor stupid. Once treated as humans and allowed a chance to organize themselves and their habitat, they move forward and move fast. It is their innate drive for self-amelioration that the village-based, grass-roots samitis draw upon. They use low-budget schemes and make maximum possible use of locally available resources. These samitis are doing for the 'real India' what the government should have done but did not.

*Dust on the Road* is not a pleasant book. But anyone interested in discovering the underbelly of our 'progress' will find here not just stunning, paralyzing facts but also the way towards a redeeming praxis.

JAIDEV teaches English at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Unsettling the Possible?

Rukmini Bhaya Nair

*Feminizing Political Discourse: Women and the Novel in India*

by Jasbir Jain

Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1988; 235 pp; Rs. 350

Politically correct ventures are often weighed down by their own virtue. Such is the case with Jasbir Jain's book on narrative and the ideology of gender. Too many theses vie for attention within a relatively attenuated space. A reader could well end up exhausted by the burden of several flags she is required to carry on a march that appears to lead to a foregone conclusion.

—  
*the western perception  
of India as an effeminate  
culture was part of  
the epistemology of  
colonialism*  
—

Some examples might help illustrate my case: one, the novel in India may not have entirely western origins but may owe much to traditional forms of narration already available on the subcontinent; two, the woman-centred nineteenth century novel inevitably reflects the dynamics of the colonial—colonized encounter; three, in this sense, the novel provides a barometer of the political realities of its time; four, 'in the wake of nationalism, the novel moved away from being femino-centred to being community-centred'; five, the 'multi-faceted' nature of the Indian polity has shaped the 'novelistic form' in India; six, the pluralism of the subcontinent shows up in the criss-crossing translations that played 'an important role in the development of the canon'. And so forth.

Whoa, you want to say to Jain, hold on. Is it 'the canon' or 'canons' that you mean in thesis six, in view of your espousal of the 'multifacetedness' of the Indian scenario and its influence on the form of the novel in thesis five? Is 'femino-centred' the same as 'woman-centred'? And if 'the western perception of India as an effeminate culture' was part of the epistemology of colonialism, is it sufficient to categorize this important insight as simply 'an added aspect of the centrality of women' in the Indian

novel and leave it at that? Such questions pile up indefinitely.

#### Discourse-universal

*these myths and legends  
which were common  
property in India  
infiltrate into most  
realistic situations  
and present a  
moral centre*  
—

But let us stay a while with Jain's first thesis. Genuine theoretical problems are thrown up by her combination of rather straightforward statements with lots of supporting evidence from critical authorities as well as primary sources. Her entirely plausible but not unsurprising contention in the first thesis is that myths and fables of enormous variety are thick on the ground in India. Legends dangle from every bel and banyan tree. Any new form that enters the subcontinent would have to adapt to this already established and proliferating literary eco-system. And the novel is no exception.

But is it not odd to shore up one's defence of such an uncontroversial argument by prefacing one's very first chapter with Edward Dimock's declaration that 'the story is universal in India ... it has also been one of India's greatest gifts to the world outside'? If these sentences actually assert what they seem to, then any sociolinguist worth her *namak* would inform Dimock that the story as a *form* is a 'discourse-universal' as opposed to an 'Indian universal', whatever that might be. This means that all societies exchange stories as a primary means of cultural communication and also generate, circulate and memorize them.

The point is that the story *qua form* is certainly not 'India's gift to the world'. If it is individual stories that India has contributed to a world-reservoir, then most other cultures

could also claim this honour. Stories, in short, gypsy-traipe across frontiers and it is this subversive potential of 'locally manufactured' stories to infiltrate and challenge the official modes of colonial and/or patriarchal representation, as these manifest themselves in the emergent form of the novel, that I wish Jain had explored in more detail. She mentions that:

These myths and legends which were common property in India infiltrate into most realistic situations and present a moral centre or controlling vision. It was in this combination of the diegetic mode and the realistic one that the Indian novel developed (p. 163).

While her suggestion that the 'Indian novel' incorporates a 'folk' diegetic or conspectual element—wherein the mimetic or 'historically real' material that it presents is 'morally' commented upon—is very interesting, it is not followed up except in a cryptic footnote:

The moral centre exists even in the earliest tales like the *Tota Kahani* and the *Tota Maina Kahani*, where the birds act as both watch-dog and confidante (fn. 82, p. 163).

Footnotes such as this smudge rather than clarify Jain's position. There might well have been diegetic aspects to the *Tota Kahani* as there were to *Aesop's Fables* and many medieval morality tales. But it is not at all apparent that this 'watch-dog' perspective is particularly 'Indian', or that it makes itself felt as a structural influence on the form of 'the Indian novel'. Until such a connection is established it makes no more sense to suggest that, say, *Anand Math* derives from 'local' diegetic traditions than to claim that the historical novels of Walter Scott are somehow linked to medieval story-texts with moral intentions. Jain provides a single example to indicate the sort of relation she has in mind. It is of Pyare Chand Mitra's 1893 novel *Alaler Ghare Dulal* which criticizes 'Anglicization and half-

baked ideas which dislocate cultural values' and uses the story of Prahlad and other Puranic legends to 'convey cultural meanings to the Indian reader'.

Diegesis, I would however wish to emphasise here, is not to be identified merely with the expression of didactic sentiment, however forcefully expressed by the author. Rather, it is recognized in contemporary narrative theory as a formal, textual notion, identified by such grammatical features as the use of the 'conversational historical present' tense (CHP) or CHP combined with the technique known as FID or 'free indirect discourse'. Therefore, just indicating that the novels of, say, Bankim Chandra or Pyare Chand Mitra rehearse a potent vocabulary of nationalism is insufficient. They would have to be shown to possess some especial stylistic features associated with diegesis through close readings of texts.

#### Translations

*the concept 'India'  
itself emerges only in  
translation, as do  
the concepts 'woman'  
and 'novel'*  
—

Indeed, one of the difficulties I had with Jain's methodology is that it presents frequent summaries of well-known novels such as Bankim Chandra's *Indira* and *Anandmath*, Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* and Prem Chand's *Vardaan* and *Sewa Sadan* but no close readings of passages are ever attempted. Admittedly, the fact that we are dealing with translations of texts proves a not inconsiderable obstacle. But Jain would, surely, be the first to admit that translations are a necessary modality of critical practice on the Indian subcontinent.

Is it possible to do close readings of translated texts? This remains an open question and is of great theoretical interest. For, works like *Feminizing Political Discourse: Women and the Novel in India* drag once again into the open what we have always implicitly known—that the concept 'India' itself emerges only in translation, as do the concepts 'woman' and 'novel'. Jain's work is extremely useful insofar as it constitutes a substantial package of reminders. It literally bristles with references to materials to be investigated. Jain's description of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1908), for example, as 'one of the first

feminist utopias' is absolutely fascinating. That Hossain left behind an incomplete article titled 'The Rights of Women' further fuels my interest.

*the compulsions that drive us in the decades to come might not consist in conformity to the conventions of political correctness*

There are, thus, wonderful incidental discoveries to be made within *Feminizing Political Discourse*. I, for one, intend to read Hossain's texts as soon as I can lay my hands on them. It may have seemed in the previous paragraphs that I have been unduly harsh on a feminist comrade. Nevertheless, I have several caveats about the theoretical soundness of the project Jain has undertaken. For instance, I think that the themes in this volume perhaps justify Jain's subtitle, but they have a very weak bearing on the notion of 'political discourse'. Neither the constitution of politics nor of discourse is interrogated in the book. To me, this means the book rests on shallow foundations. Although the sincerity and scholarship evident in many of the essays are to be commended, the time seems to have come when neither flag-waving statements, such as 'literary history, like political history, needs to be freed from colonial discourse', nor a plethora of scholarly footnotes will be sufficient to hold our critical interest for very long. The compulsions that drive us in the decades to come might not consist in conformity to the conventions of political correctness but in the urge to discover, to rediscover and to self-discover.

The feminist critic Elanie Showalter recently wrote that 'The urgent question in telling—or reading—women's lives is: How fully could a woman live? Asking this question is risky because 'it unsettles our assumptions of the possible'. Jasbir Jain's book may stop far short of 'unsettling our assumptions of the possible' but by the very act of assuming as much as it does, it unsettles some readers like myself enough to sit up and argue with its delineation of the possibilities themselves. That, I suppose, is a start.

RUKMINI BHAYA Nair teaches at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Going Spiritual

Neena Arora

Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert

by Rudolfo Anaya

New York: Warner Books, 1996; 194 pp; \$17.95

This book is different from the earlier works of Anaya who is known for his competence in handling the legends, folklore and folk-tales of Mexican Indians of the South-west. Anaya became famous with the publication of his first novel *Bless Me, Ultima* in 1972. This was followed by equally good works like *Heart of Aztlan*, *Tortuga*, *Albuquerque*, *Zila Summer*, and a number of *cuentos* (stories), children's books, and plays, etc.

#### Chicano Consciousness

*extensively explores the psyche of a society that 'throws away its children'*

*Bless Me, Ultima* is about the effect of war on American communities, the alienation of sons and their flight to the city. The novel begins with the coming of Ultima to the household of Antonio Marez. She is a *curandera* (one who cures with herbs and magic). She was the midwife at Antonio's birth; she assumes that role once again as she struggles to give birth to his soul. The events of Antonio's early youth are violent and incomprehensible and through each shattering event he is accompanied by the wise and tender presence of Ultima. She blesses him with a vision of life which is neither Christian nor pagan but a fusion of both and, somehow, deeper than either. The novel eloquently presents Chicano consciousness in all its intriguing complexity.

In the *Heart of Aztlan*, Anaya's treatment of the urban experience is remarkable. The story begins with the sale of Clemente Chavez's three acre farm in the small agrarian community of Guadalupe, New Mexico. The land is depleted — no longer capable of sustaining the people who have worked on it for generations. And life in Albuquerque offers few compensations to Chavez, his wife and their four

teenage children. The novel depicts the systematic destruction of the family unit once the rootedness to the land has been severed.

*Tortuga* is the third novel in the trilogy. It is set in a children's hospital and graphically describes horrible diseases, amputations, and the nerve-shattering cries of pain and despair. It extensively explores the psyche of a society that 'throw[s] away [its] children'.

Anaya's latest work, *Jalamanta*, is the story of a wanderer from the desert, a seeker of truth, who teaches ancient wisdom to the people and aspires for the 'revolution of the spirit' (p.31). The authorities, who feel threatened by his outrageous speeches, exile him to an unknown desert for thirty years. Upon returning to his wife and friends, he is again put into jail for trial and probably execution. But his message has reached the despairing multitude.

#### Needs of the Spirit

*at times the soul is fragmented or injured, but it must retain a centre: the pieces must be recovered.*

The story conveys a deep message to a world lost in the labyrinth of materialism and violence: a world gone blind to the needs of the spirit. He exhorts the people to rise above ordinary affairs and attain self-realisation and spirituality. He conveys his subtle message in simple and lucid words put in the mouth of a commoner—Jalamanta. His real name is Amado which means 'beloved', but his spiritual guide changed it to 'Jalamanta' which means the one 'who pulls away the veils that blind the soul' (p. 26). Jalamanta spiritually enriches the people, who would flock around him near the village river every morning. His preaching revolves around the theory of the supremacy of the soul.

The cycle of time dies and is reborn, but the soul never comes to an end. The body is perishable; so is the mind. But the soul is gathered into the cosmic wind. At times the soul is fragmented or injured, but it must retain a centre: the pieces must be recovered. Its wholeness can be restored through prayer and meditation. Jalamanta advises people to refrain from materialistic possessions. The real power comes from 'within', not from worldly possessions. Man can build weapons but the soul builds the path of peace. He, therefore, asks people to shun violence, anger, hate, greed and desires that take possession of the mind. When one gives in to desires the care of the soul is forgotten. The soul is blinded by our distrust of one another. Ego creates distance between people and between oneself and the soul. Jalamanta finally affirms: 'Soul is the Holy Grail filled with love and light' (p. 90). He exhorts people to follow the 'Path of the Sun', a way of arriving at unity with the Universal Spirit. He repeatedly reminds people that God 'needs no Cathedrals' (p. 76): He lives in one's heart.

Going through the book, an Indian reader is bound to be reminded of the ancient Hindu philosophy of the immortality of the soul which is, in fact, the basis of most religious teaching. The book is an insightful study of the place of the soul in man's life. Eschewing dogma, Anaya preaches the simple truth about the soul and its existence which is 'veiled' and 'illusioned' and needs to be uncovered through introspection to lead a meaningful life.

A few critics censured Anaya for not treating the subjects of earlier Chicano literature— injustice, oppression, poverty or the border—in his works. However, even though Anaya concerns himself mainly with the cultural aspect of Chicano life, there is a tremendous amount of diversity and range in his work within this parameter. In this respect his work exemplifies the increasing sophistication of Chicano literature which has travelled a great distance since its urgent political beginnings in the mid-1960s. Dwelling exclusively and intensely on the 'soul', *Jalamanta* is a flawlessly printed novel. Written in a simple narrative form, the story is gripping and makes for a satisfying reading.

NEENA ARORA teaches English at Evening College, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.



## BOOK REVIEW

### Varieties of Orientalism

Kumkum Roy

Aryans and the British India

Thomas R. Trautmann

New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1997; xx+260 pp; Rs. 250

In an age when voices of scholarship have become strident if not shrill, *Aryans and British India* is remarkably different, characterised as it is by gentle understatement, concern, and erudition. The last is something Trautmann's readers have grown to expect, especially in view of his classic, *Dravidian Kinship*.

Trautmann's present intervention is located within a number of overlapping contexts. As someone who could be branded an orientalist, a term which has acquired pejorative connotations, especially since Said, he draws attention to the complexities and complications which have, historically, characterised orientalism. He points to the pressing need to distinguish between what he classifies as Orientalism<sup>1</sup> or knowledge of the Orient, and Orientalism<sup>2</sup> or representations of the Orient, even while recognising that the two are not water-tight compartments. The second context, which derives from the first, is that of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial encounter. Trautmann grounds his critique of what he terms the 'inflationary' definition of orientalism in an analysis of the multiple constructs of the notion of the Aryan within this framework. And, occasionally, he focuses on the larger European context within which knowledge generated by British Indologists was both taken up and transformed.

#### Wisdom of the East

*the authority attributed to the eyewitness (e.g., travellers) was now contested, and to an extent replaced by the claims of the linguist or scholar*

Trautmann begins by speaking of William Jones and the Asiatic Society. He probes beneath Jones's well-known identification of the Indo-European family of languages and

translations of works typical of the 'wisdom of the east'. Trautmann locates Jones's enterprise within the latter's attempt to validate the Bible in general and Mosaic ethnology in particular. This envisaged human races as branching out from a single tree. This model, he argues, provided for kinship amongst ethnic groups even as it recognised divergences.

His suggestion that Jones was by no means unique is equally interesting: he was working within earlier and contemporary traditions of Muslim and Christian scholarship. What distinguished Jones's work was his critical (though by no means infallible) use of etymology. This, Trautmann argues, resulted in a major shift in paradigms of authority. The authority attributed to the eyewitness (e.g., travellers) was now contested, and to an extent replaced by the claims of the linguist or scholar. Thus, the constitution of knowledge underwent a radical transformation.

#### Indomania and Indophobia

*Indomania had its lunatic fringe as well: even serious Sanskritists such as Wilford could believe that the Puranas contained references to England as Svetadvipa or the White Island*

Trautmann next explores the foci of what he identifies as British 'Indomania'. These included Hinduism, which was projected as being essentially monotheistic. Besides, Hindu scriptures were imaginatively reinterpreted to suggest that they corroborated the Bible. This complex, and somewhat idealised, relationship is best typified, as Trautmann observes, in the iconography of Jones's statue in St Paul's cathedral. Jones, armed with the *Manusmṛiti*, stands above a unique visualisation of the cosmogonic

churning of the ocean.

Indomania had its lunatic fringe as well—including Monboddo, who believed that Sanskrit was the unadulterated language of ancient Egypt. Trautmann demonstrates that the boundaries between scholarship and flights of fancy were by no means sharply drawn: even serious Sanskritists such as Wilford could believe that the Puranas contained references to England as *Svetadvipa* or the White Island.

The obvious extremes of Indomania provided a useful lever with which the votaries of Indophobia could prise apart the orientalist framework. Trautmann documents Grant's construct of the decadent east, characterised by oriental despotism, and Mill's successful attempt to claim superior authority for the metropolitan philosopher with the skills to sift through the mire of facts which supposedly entrapped both the language specialists and the India hands. In the process, the orientalist notion of Indo-European kinship was suppressed, being replaced by an emphasis on difference, which could only be partly mitigated by western education and regulated contact.

At the same time, Trautmann points out that it is facile to pose the contrast between Indophiles and Indophobes too sharply. While each challenged the other's definitions of civilisation and bases of intellectual authority, there was a shared belief in the superiority of western civilisation. Besides, Indophobes drew heavily, if selectively, on the Sanskrit works compiled and translated by orientalist, even as they offered a different reading.

There were other complications as well. Trautmann traces the nearly-forgotten bond between philology and ethnology, dominated by the former, which dissolved as the latter was appropriated within the framework of race science. Within India, the dissolution was marked by the gradual recognition of the autonomy of Dravidian and other non-Aryan linguistic families, which were

clearly non-Sanskritic.

*in the process, the term 'Aryan' was wrenched from its Sanskritic roots, and acquired an exclusive definition, whose grim memories are still alive*

The breach between philology (especially Sanskrit) and ethnology in Britain was, if anything, even more complete. This is exemplified in the vituperative reactions to Max Muller's suggestion that the English and the Bengalis may have shared common blood. While this could be explained in terms of Indophobia, Trautmann presses the argument further, pointing to the emergence of race science, emphasising racial essentialism bolstered by fossil finds, which pushed human origins into the remote past, far beyond the documented or conjectured histories of Indo-European languages. Paradoxically, in the process, the term 'Aryan' was wrenched from its Sanskritic roots, and acquired an exclusive definition whose grim memories are still alive.

This did not mark the end of the relationship between Sanskritists and ethnologists, especially in the Indian context. What we find in fact is an enduring, if sterile, relationship, exemplified by what Trautmann characterises as the racial theory of Indian civilisation. This postulates the existence of two races: an indigenous, uncivilised, dark-skinned race, which was conquered by the civilising, long-nosed, ideally fair-skinned Aryans. In Risley's influential formulation, moreover, caste was equated with race. Trautmann draws attention to the fragile evidence on which the theory rests—a handful of by no means unambiguous passages in the *Rg Veda* and a highly selective use of anthropometry.

## BOOK REVIEW

### After the Green Revolution

K. K. Kaushik

A Profile of Economic and Socio-Cultural Change (1965-95)

by B.L. Abbi and Kesar Singh

Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, 1997

Among the Indian states, the development of agriculture has been the fastest in Punjab. It witnessed a distinct change during the last three decades. This transformation was realized through the use of new agricultural technology which led to deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural changes. The literature on socio-cultural transformation, however, remains quite limited: there have only been some micro-level studies of its characteristics. The monograph under review falls under this category. It seeks to probe the changes in selected aspects of the life in a village (Barwali Khurd) in an agriculturally developed district of Punjab. Based on extensive field work and ethnographic data, it deals with the changing nature of production relations and socio-cultural dimensions of the village in the wake of the green revolution.

The study provides a succinct though brief history of rural Punjab starting from the aftermath of partition up to the onset and spread of militancy. Important changes in the cropping pattern, especially decline in the cultivation of coarse cereals, are noted. Education and health remained neglected areas; public investment was weighted in favour of power generation. Nature of the growth of productive forces, development induced changes in the social structure, the inter-connection between kinship and marriage, and the changing interplay of caste, occupation and class have been analysed. Social relations centered on landholding and land utilization, village politics and its response to panchayati raj institutions, and co-operatives and gurdwara management committees also form the subject matter of the monograph.

#### A Micro-setting

The novelty of Abbi's and Singh's study lies in their ability to combine a historical perspective with a field study of the village. Their focus is broadly on two questions. First, an analysis of the specific context and the factors leading to the onset of green revolution in the village.

Second, the way new agricultural technology has changed the socio-cultural dimensions, agrarian structure and village politics in a micro setting.

The authors argue that the strong base of irrigation, well developed network of village link roads and power facilities, growing and dynamic rural institutions and progressive state intervention made the village ready to participate in the green revolution. The mechanization of agriculture brought about distinct changes in women's role in family agricultural work. The demand for hired labour for skilled and unskilled work has increased and, as a result, the nature and duration of employment have undergone important changes. The ability of the households to generate subsistence from hereditary occupation has declined. The village artisans have suffered loss of employment due to influx of migratory labour and have diversified their occupational activities.

*the traditional leadership  
has been replaced by  
performance based  
contractual leadership  
largely due to panchayati  
raj institutions*

The traditional bonds of the caste and community, the patron-client relationship and the *jajmani* have slackened. Caste-wise distribution with different family types clearly established that joint family system has not shown any sign of weakening, especially among the Jats. A strong preference for sibling marriages among the Jats has kept their families united. The joint family system has its problems and weaknesses but these are resolved at a confederal level.

The study shows concentration of land in medium and large holdings. The impact of land ceiling has been very marginal. Leasing-in and leasing-out of the land are resorted to by the marginal and medium

owners. Non-farm employment is a major factor motivating owners to lease-out land.

#### Saturation

The benefits of the green revolution, given the existing resource endowment and socio-economic environment, have reached a point of saturation. This has added to the growing concern for finding a more sustainable and diversified cropping pattern. It has been suggested that 15 per cent of the farm land should be shifted to the cultivation of fruits and vegetables reducing the area under food crops.

One of the encouraging findings is that the traditional leadership has, at least to some extent, been replaced by performance based contractual leadership largely due to panchayati raj institutions. The participation of the villagers in the decision making process, irrespective of their caste, has shown an upward trend at the grassroots level. However, though the 73rd Amendment provides 33 per cent reservation for women in village panchayats, it could not be realized due to the state's inability to hold elections. This in no way constrained the women from participating in village politics and they have been holding important positions in the panchayat. The period of militancy in the state did affect the village politics for sometime but certain sarpanchs were able to maintain the balance between the two.

It has been reported that it is generally the farmers placed higher in the socio-cultural order who stimulated the adoption of the green revolution in rural Punjab. The authors tend to agree with this view in the context of Barwali Khurd. I would have liked them to inquire into the health and the social welfare aspects of the village population. This is important because households with a surplus income would be vertically mobile, while those on the verge of subsistence would fall behind on this count. The study takes little notice of the status of migratory labour within the households.

The main merit of the study is its careful investigation and lucid presentation. The utility of the book is enhanced by a glossary of local words used in the text and a comprehensive bibliography.

K.K. KAUSHIK teaches economics at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

## CONFERENCE

### Foreign Direct Investment

A research seminar on 'Foreign Direct Investment: Theory, Policy and Prospects' was organized by the Inter University Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIAS, Shimla, at the Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, from October 16 to 25, 1997. T.T. Sreekumar, introducing the theme, focussed on the socio-economic and political backdrop in the context of an unprecedented rise in FDI inflows into third world countries, which is a reflection of their increasing integration into the investment plans of Transnational Corporations (TNCs).

Achin Chakraborty critically reviewed the theoretical foundations of the concept of investment. According to him, FDI could be understood only against the backdrop of a plethora of geo-political and economic factors which influence decision making at the national as well as at the global level. K.K. Subramanian discussed the relative role of various factors influencing FDI inflows, the crucial determinants being (i) availability of primary material inputs for manufacture and (ii) the size of the domestic market for the sale of the manufactured products.

K.J. Joseph argued that the removal of tariffs consequent on globalization and liberalization would promote FDI inflows into those regions where investment is cost-advantageous. Sunil Mani's paper analysed this issue by comparing the experience of Malaysia and India, the former displaying greater success in providing an investor friendly environment.

While developing countries appear to be engaged in a fierce competition to woo FDI inflows, there is hardly any consensus as to the long-run impact of such investment in these countries. The negative impact of an unregulated flow of FDI through corporate investment was highlighted by Umadevi. M.A. Oomen pointed out the changing role of FDI in this era of globalization, wherein the process- and product-patenting laws make it difficult for the hosts to benefit from the technology spillovers generated by the subsidiaries.

T.T. SREEKUMAR and K.U. UMAKRISHNAN

## BOOK REVIEW

### Ecophilosophy: Battling for Antarctica

Sanjay Chaturvedi

*Antarctica, A Natural Reserve: A Study in International Environmental Politics*

by Rama Puri

Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1997; 352 pp; Rs. 400

The emergence of a new and unprecedented set of global environmental challenges has highlighted the disjuncture between a single, integrated and complex ecosystem, and a fragmented system of sovereign states where cooperation is limited. Thus non-governmental organizations have become influential in international environmental debates.

Prior to the 1980s, the adequacy of the environmental protection rules and their compliance under the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) were not questioned. But the discovery of the 'ozone hole' played an important role in bringing Antarctica to the centre of debate on the ethics and politics of sustainability. It accentuated the significance of the post-1983 UN-based challenge to the rights of Antarctic Treaty Parties (ATPs) to manage what was interpreted by many as the common heritage of mankind. In 1991, the Protocol on Environmental Protection was signed by the ATPs and Antarctica was declared a 'natural reserve'. But, can we say that the Protocol has resolved the fundamental tension between commercial-exploitative values and conservation-ecological ones? How certain is the translation of the principles and purposes of the Protocol into efficient and effective management practices?

Within this changing geopolitical context, Rama Puri has investigated with competence and in considerable detail the legal, political and ethical aspects of the environmental argument regarding Antarctica. The starting point of this account is ecophilosophy. Puri argues that 'a code of environmental ethics...will hopefully ensure human progress without jeopardizing ecological balance' (p. 17). She believes that it is a moral and political imperative that newer forms of ecophilosophy are brought to bear on new challenges such as preserving the Antarctic environment as a vital sector for global environmental health.

#### Antarctica and Global Environment

*can the principle of the Common Heritage of Mankind be applied to Antarctica? ... should the ATS continue to exist, or be replaced by some UN-based system of management?*

The argument that follows is both minute and thematic. In chapter I Rama Puri is concerned with interlinkages between the Antarctic and global environment. The sections that deserve special mention relate to Indian subcontinental summer monsoon, pollutants and their impact in Antarctica, ozone depletion and its effects, and global warming and rise in sea level. In response to the point that the only way to protect the Antarctic environment is to exclude human activity there altogether, Puri argues that 'the question to be faced in practice is not whether the value of the activity to be undertaken outweighs the adverse environmental impact or not; but how to minimize the same while allowing some activities useful to humanity and to avoid some others...without which human race must learn to live' (p. 60).

In the second chapter, Puri discusses various legal and geopolitical features of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, and provides a useful summary of the origin and evolution of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). She talks about the implications of UNCLOS III for Antarctica and the Southern Ocean but not as thoroughly as some readers might expect given her expertise on the law of the sea. She focuses in chapter III on resource exploitation and environmental conservation in the Antarctic. Despite some overlap/repetition of material between this chapter and the previous one,

readers will find a detailed analysis of various Antarctic resource regimes along with their 'environmental audit'.

The discussion so far in the book may give the impression that Antarctica and its governance have throughout been the exclusive concern of those inside it. On the contrary, as Puri shows in chapter IV, 'outsiders', such as India, took an interest in the icy continent as early as the mid-1950s. Is the ATS 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate'? Does it represent the interests of mankind as a whole? How effective is it as a caretaker of Antarctic science as well as environment? Can the principle of the Common Heritage of Mankind be applied to Antarctica? And, most explosive of all, should the ATS continue to exist, or be replaced by some UN-based system of management? Puri handles such difficult questions skillfully and persuasively. Her analysis of the UN debate on the 'Question of Antarctica' is fairly balanced and takes into account the arguments and counter-arguments of the critics both of the ATS and the ATPs right up to the signing of the Madrid Protocol in 1991 when the UN debate 'started petering out'.

Chapter V deals with the making of the Madrid Protocol and critically evaluates the comprehensiveness as well as effectiveness of the framework, which is supposed to provide the basis for a more potent environmental protection in the Antarctica. The geopolitical as well as legal difficulties associated with the environmental impact assessments are pinpointed along with some glaring gaps in the Protocol. Puri's contention is that despite the best efforts, a compromise remains a compromise. 'The Madrid Protocol is no exception' (p. 243).

#### New Environmental Paradigm

*the ultimate success of a new environmental ethics would lie in the ability of politics to respond to the imperatives of ecophilosophy and sustainability*

Rama Puri next turns to an elaboration of what she calls an 'Environmental Ethical Approach'. Her intention is to realize a 'new environmental paradigm', grounded in the principles of sustainable development. And in order to incul-

cate the new value system, humans would require an 'environmental ethical philosophy'. '[T]he basic rule of the environmental ethical philosophy is to give recognition to the "right" to live to nature, which in turn gives us humans the right to survive and thrive' (p. 265). But the difficulty is that 'the outer physical environments of mankind have changed drastically and rapidly while his inner environments of thoughts and values have not kept pace with them' (p. 265). Accordingly, Puri argues for an ecophilosophy, based on the understanding that 'so far we have humanized nature, what is required is to spiritualize it' (p. 299).

The concluding chapter approaches the entire range of Antarctic management issues from the angle of ecophilosophy. For Puri, 'the green movement will have to exert tremendously to convince the rich that there is a life beyond luxuries; and for that they will have to develop and propagate a strong ethical argument in favour of conserving the global and the Antarctic environment' (p. 326).

To sum up, *Antarctica* raises questions that are worthy of consideration by all serious students of the increasingly interdisciplinary Antarctic studies. It should also appeal to the students of international law and politics, environment, and ecophilosophy. One may make two final points. First, one truly hopes that behind the 'greening' of governmentality there is a genuine concern for ecophilosophy and sustainability. For, in an increasingly globalizing and deterritorializing world, where the 'fixed spaces' of international politics and political community are beginning to get unravelled, the emergence of new congealments of geo-power called 'environmental security' can also be seen and interpreted as a response to the problems that environmental degradation is posing for the rich and the powerful. Second, the ultimate success of a new environmental ethics would lie essentially in the willingness and ability of politics to recognize and respond to the imperatives of ecophilosophy and sustainability. This is neither simple nor straightforward. Rama Puri is quite right in saying that so far only the goal of ecophilosophy and sustainable development has been set. The real battle is yet to begin.

SANJAY CHATURVEDI teaches Political Science at Panjab University, Chandigarh.