Aesthetics of Anger

Jaidev

OPPOSITIONAL AESTHETICS: READINGS FROM A HYPHENATED SPACE

by Arun Mukherjee

Toronto: TSAR, 1994, 191 pp.; $ 19.95.

Controversy dogged Arun Mukherjee's *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Culture and Cultural Imperialism* right since she sought Government funding for its publication. The referees rejected it as 'too angry'. Even when the book managed to come out in 1988, it was systematically ignored by the dominant media. However, not only did it take the academic circles by storm, the entire edition was sold out within a few years. Her new book includes the whole of it and several of her more recent essays.

Oppositional Aesthetics is one of the angriest books of literary theory I have ever come across. It is unlikely that any reader will remain unaffected by its passionate anger or its urgent moral-ethical agenda. Reading it, I found myself almost arguing aloud with it.

The book is likely to win Mukherjee more enemies than friends, but certainly it will influence, impact everyone of its readers. In any case, anger here is neither blind nor blinding. Mukherjee is a teacher of literature, a scholar, a thinker, a feminist, a post-structuralist, and expresses her anger only after meticulously fulfilling all the obligations that go with these roles. Anger glows throughout the book, but the glow is by virtue of her deep involvement in literature, its writing, its publishing, its teaching. She is clear that it is and needs to be seen as a socio-political institution. Her anger emanates from her struggles to relate her ethical life with her roles as a Third-World woman living and teaching and researching in a First-World habitus. The interface of life and literary theory might sound anomalous, but she brings it off without neglecting the claims of either. The result is a surprisingly fresh kind of theoretical book that is at the same time an autobiography, activist praxis, polemics, literary theory, and the map of a complex social situation.

The book is against any tactical, convenient amnesia: 'I won't forget . . . [the Kamagatu Maru incident, Canada's racist immigration laws until 1947] and other such facts pertaining to Native Canadians, Chinese Canadians, Caribbean Canadians, Japanese Canadians until I begin to see real changes happen. I won't forget them until I see Canadian schools teach about all Canadians . . . . I won't forget them until I see Canadian universities open their doors to Canadians and teach and produce research about all Canadians' (p. 14).

Why such vehemence? The answer is provided in one of the telling anecdotes she relates. A native Canadian poet visited what then used to be Rhodesia. As soon as she introduced herself as a Native North American, the response was: 'But you were supposed to be extinct!' It is against such ideologically engineered invisibility that Mukherjee takes a valiant stand. Year after year, she confronts students nurtured on a heavy dose of liberal, universalist-formalist vocabulary. So well-indoctrinated are they that they cannot conceive of literature except in terms of form, imagery, rhythm and archetypes even when the text in question is about racism. She takes a stand against all such habits of heart as project literature as universal, dehistoricized, 'eternal'.

Oppositional Aesthetics is one of the angriest books of literary theory I have ever come across. It is unlikely that any reader will remain unaffected by its passionate anger or its urgent moral-ethical agenda. ... What makes the book important, perhaps also controversial, to us here is not so much its single-minded, occasionally obsessive, pursuit of its anti-establishment agenda as its outright rejection of fellow-travellers whose paths might be different but whose goal is not.

What does Mukherjee do to change the mindset of such students? Merely prescribing the right kind of texts is not enough. For one can always read them non-politically, purely formally. The task she sets up for herself is to shake them out of their hard formalism which goes very well with their unconscious racism: 'As a non-white female academician, I intend to make sure that my students will not go away with such unconscious racism unchallenged' (p. 11). Not the texts so much as the teaching and talking about literature, teaching how literature is more than form, is the task which gives her legitimacy as a person. The canon favours a 'prophylactic' view of literature, favours releasing young minds from 'the bondage of history', emptying even the subversive literature of its subversive content - all in the name of metaphysical or eternally valid aesthetic approaches. Mukherjee sees through this game - it is hegemonistic, racist, status-quoist. Its victims are those who, due to historical circumstances, are on the periphery. No charity from above can make them sivible. Visibility has to be secured through hard struggle. This struggle cannot be a matter of mere research conducted in tranquillity. Mukherjee's book is angry perhaps because it is part of an ongoing battle.

That battle is against the literary establishment in Canada, against literary history as well as the assumptions influencing the decisions about who are to be included in it and who to be left out, and against some of her fellow authors and critics. Wallace Stevens is debunked, Robert Lowell is praised. Discriminations are always on, and there is a logic, however unacceptable it may be to some, behind each of her positions. These positions are hard, often hurting, but emerge from an acute understanding of ideologies that sustain critical approaches such as the cultish archetypal approach and the equally cultish 'white' feminism.

It is easy to describe Mukherjee's ideological space. It is opposite all universalism, all formalism and archetypal criticism, and also quite away from all such seemingly friendly places as white Western feminism and post-modernism, which two, in the name of urgent priorities, can in effect repress both Third-World women and women writers. The most inspiring thing about her chosen position is that here there is no room for apologetic gestures: Canada is the host society, but the Third-World immigrants do not have to justify their presence there, let alone feel grateful. They are there, have to be treated as equals, and will oppose all discrimination - hidden or visible.

From where she is, history appears inescapable. It clings like mud to the Third Worlders, and anyone who tries to cleanse oneself of the cultural legacy and ideals has to be declared guilty. Ondaatje tries to cleanse himself with the assumptions supplied by the establishment. Mukherjee is fierce in her denunciation. A novelist claiming to be a 'trans-culturalist' sets her work in India without knowing enough about the relevant cultural nuances and local conditions. Mukherjee details her lapses and thus makes her - and her novel - appear silly. A translation of Renu continually interferes with the original Hindi - and she bashes it up. She hits out not only at films like *Out of Africa* and *The Gods Must be Crazy* but also at David Lean's *A Passage to India*, which degrades Dr. Aziz in order to raise the image of Adela Quested. Mukherjee is no respecter of persons, is never daunted, but of course always takes care to first build up an irrefutable, fact-based case against those who 'violate' the Third World. Thus, Neil Bissoondath (a nephew of V. S. Naipaul) comes in for some real drubbing because he is out to demoralize the Caribbean by denying them a future.

Even though she is never indiscriminate in her praise, she can be quite handsome towards good Third-World texts and authors. She admires Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* for its wonderful sense of comedy and its exploitation of our oral tradition of story-telling, even though she is not at all happy about its occasional misogynistic jokes. Still, the novel is 'not realistic but reality'. The comment is reassuring, especially in our time when so much of critical energy is being directed towards projecting

contd. on page 22

Handcuffed to History

Supriya Chaudhuri

THE USES OF LITERARY HISTORY

Edited by Marshall Brown

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, 316 pp., price not stated.

Roman Jakobson once told a story in which he compared literary historians to the police 'who are supposed to arrest a certain person, arrest everybody and carry off everything they find in the house and all the people who pass by chance in the street'. Thus, he said, 'historians of literature appropriate everything - the social setting, psychology, politics, philosophy.' Fascinating as it is to dwell on the political causes that led Jakobson to arrive at this Kafkaesque analogy in 1921, I would like to suggest that in our own times, we are being impelled towards a similar appropriation. I was reminded of Jakobson's story by Marshall Brown's beautifully edited volume of essays by a wide range of literary and cultural critics - *The Uses of Literary History* - a volume which addresses the problems of writing a history of literature.

What is the history of literature? Like all questions nowadays, this is a question which allows of several different interpretations. In the text of an unpublished lecture on precisely this topic, Stephen Greenblatt recently allowed himself the space for reflection on the issues that separated Arnold's Hebraists from his Hellenists, on the historical utility of polite or humane learning as a symbolic marker for men of culture, as implied in the test for 'benefit of clergy', or more rudely put, 'neck-verse', and on Bacon's observation in *The Advancement of Learning* that 'the History of Literature is wanting'. To be sure, Bacon did not mean by literature what we might think of by that term. Yet it is also true that, as Laurence Lipking notes in the first essay of Brown's volume, 'A Trout in the Milk', we have in our own times moved back considerably to Bacon's idea of the history of literature as covering the records of all kinds of learning and arts, 'their antiquities, their progresses, their migrations ... their decays, disappearances and revivals'. Literature today no longer means, so Lipking assures us, an exclusive body of imaginative or fictional texts of agreed cultural value: and 'once historical scholarship shed the obligation to be demonstrably "literary", a vast, uncharted field opened.... The new literary history seems potentially free and wide as the world'.

Who can deny that Stephen Greenblatt is himself largely responsible for this redefinition of literary history as a history of accidents and circumstances, of trout in the milk, rather than of canonical literary texts? Yet Greenblatt notes a certain 'quality of resistance' in the objects traditionally defined as literary, so that literary history 'is always the history of the possibility of literature'. However willing we may be to place *Hamlet* side by side with a bill of sale, there is little doubt that it is finally *Hamlet*'s history that is being written. 'I began with a desire to speak to the dead', so Greenblatt said in the celebrated opening to *Shakespearean Negotiations*, and the ghosts he speaks of conjuring at the end of this talk are literary ghosts, spirits or fathers who revisit us in questionable shapes. *Pace* Derrida, it has now become fashionable to speak the language of conjuration, and I wonder whether it was merely fanciful on my part to have seen the ghost of literary history, almost a spectral presence, hover over Brown's volume, never quite coinciding with anything in it.

Marshall Brown's collection brings together a formidable range of scholars, from the conservative to the radical, covering formalist, feminist, New Historicist, and post-colonial points of view. It is divided into three roughly equal sections: literary history, literature in history, and literature as history. There are some important names in each section, but as is often the case nowadays, they are sometimes represented by a minor and not very distinguished piece of writing. An outstanding exception would be Jerome McGann's incisive five pages on the task of textual criticism and editing in engaging with problems that contemporary theory and hermeneutics, even of the New Historicist variety, have largely avoided: the material conditions of record, of facticity and positive knowledge. McGann is seconded, not very effectively, by Marjorie Perloff examining the question of literature in the condition of post-modernity. More impressive contributions, even while restricted to the immediate concerns of the scholars involved, come from Jonathan Arac and Howard Bloch: Arac firmly defining literary history by its 'referential falsifiability' and going on to consider the issues of a 'national' history posed by his own experience in contributing to the new *Cambridge History of American Literature*, and Bloch offering a brief review of the current concerns of medieval studies. These latter have always struck me as an exemplary case of scholarship alive to the material conditions of production and the contexts of use, the specifically literary never marked off as a domain separate, for example, from habits of eating, sexual abstinence, dress, law, medicine, or architecture.

In this first section, again, David Perkins offers a muted and old-fashioned *apologia* for taste, the function of the 'good reader' in a history of reception. Yet on the whole the collection is silent on the vexed question of the canon, Western or otherwise; no contributor *directly* addresses the problem of defining the ideal objects of a literary history, permitting Bloom's cat to range among the pigeons by default. What emerges by implication - and perhaps this is as good an implication as any - is that literary history may be as fragmentary, as discontinuous, as non-narrative, as we choose to make it, that it exists in a space that is provisional and contested.

In the second section, Geoffrey Hartman leads with an examination of the whole notion of cultural inheritance by enquiring into public memory and its discontents, particularly in the way in which traumatic experiences like war or the Holocaust are or are not memorialized. In an oblique way, Hartman's idea of a literature which counteracts 'on the one hand, the impersonality and instability of public memory, and on the other, the determinism and fundamentalism of collective memory based on identity politics' is countered by the powerful voice of Walter Benn Michaels, arguing that it is only the fiction of race that can effectively create an identity for the subject engaged in historical study. Michael's essay, on the victims of the new historicism, is interesting for other reasons as well, but it is ultimately this polemical point, contested by Jonathan Arac among others, which makes it a site of controversy. This controversy is only partly about New Historicism and whether or not it is complicit in the structures of power it pretends to analyse. It involves questions of cultural politics by no means exclusive to Michaels's own critical preference, and might perhaps have been more fully answered.

Flanked by Hartman and Michaels, the second section is held together by three excellent pieces, by Anne Skura on the historicity of psychoanalysis, Donna Landry on figures of the feminine, and Peter Stallybrass on the sexing of Shakespeare's sonnets. I especially enjoyed Landry's recovery of figures of the Amazon spectrally haunting the angel in the house. Stallybrass's essay covers better-known ground in re-examining the shock of Malone's late-eighteenth century editorial construction of Shakespeare, particularly the Shakespeare of the *Sonnets*, distressingly disclosed as a sodomite. Similar issues are at stake in Richard Dellamora's essay on textual/sexual politics in the work of Hardy and Forster, especially in the acts of deliberate suppression of textual records by both writers and their appeal to the judgement of a future, predicated audience. Post-colonial literary history is by contrast badly represented by Rukmini Bhaya Nair's essay on Kipling, Tagore and Allan Sealy.

The last section, on literature as history, is perhaps inevitably divided. It is also curiously blind to the possibility, so much present to historians today, of reading history as literature acknowledging, for example, the metonymic bias of New Historicism. However, the section makes a fine beginning with Susan Stewart on the possibility of a lyric history, firmly engaging with the problems of a literature that seems to give itself most fully to formalist rather than historicist analysis, and returns to these issues in Paul Fry's 'The Hum of Literature', arguing that 'literature as such is not historical'. This apparently reductive and simple-minded statement is actually the cue for an attractive and subtle essentialist thesis, ranging for its materials from Emily Dickinson back to Virgil. I was not persuaded by Fry, but both he and Stewart contribute significantly to the interest of Brown's collection. They flank more historicized and

polemical pieces by Charles Altieri on historical self-consciousness, Dennis Hollier on literature as a dead language, Annabel Patterson on free speech, and Doris Sommer on 'minority' literature. Altieri, adapting the Oxford philosopher J. L. Mackie's notion of 'boot-strapping', argues intelligently for an historical analysis which self-consciously takes on the burden of completing or resisting what it shows itself to have inherited. As Altieri implies, all history is self-limited by some variant of Spitzer's 'linguistic circle': the task of the literary historian is to acknowledge the problem and situate historical scholarship within it. While Altieri, and to a lesser extent Hollier and Sommer, are clearly engaging with the question of a literary history, Annabel Patterson's essay does not really seem to belong in this volume at all. While approving her desire to reply to Stanley Fish's 'There's No Such Thing As Free Speech and It's A Good Thing Too', I found it impossible to determine what Patterson's examination of the question implicit in Fish's title ('Is there free speech in this class?'), from Milton's *Areopagitica* to the First Amendment to the Constitution of America, was doing in a project devoted to the history of literature.

As one trained in the discipline of textual scholarship, I cannot close without noting the material occasion for which these texts were produced. Sixteen of the essays in this volume - some amplified - were written for a special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* devoted to 'the state of literary history'. Three others, those by Donna Landry, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, and Susan Stewart, appear to have been specially commissioned for Brown's volume; Geoffrey Hartman has reworked a piece earlier published. All this makes for a remarkable unity of concerns and polemical issues, while Brown is to be commended for the avoidance of a grand narrative, the sense of a project imposed and collectively constructed. I would like to record at the end only a minor though nagging dissatisfaction: there is much of interest in the volume, but little - even from the best writers - that stays in one's mind. If the primary use of literary history is to inform the memory, that end is only partially served by this collection.

SUPRIYA CHAUDHURY is Professor of English Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta.

Gandhi and the Global Agenda

Makarand Paranjape

GANDHI AND THE PRESENT GLOBAL CRISIS

Edited by Ramashray Roy

Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996, xii + 161 pp., Rs. 200.

The publication of this book is an important event not just in the academic calendar of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study but in that of Gandhian studies in general. For the Institute, it represents the first fruit of the on-going team project on Gandhi, which was started in 1993. The project was initiated to examine the continuing relevance of Gandhi for the prevailing modern crisis. As a first step, a three-day seminar was organized in March 1994 in New Delhi. This book, which takes its title from the seminar, contains some of the papers presented during that seminar.

For Gandhian studies this book is an important event because it rescues the discipline from mediocre, uninspiring and moribund minds and shows how it may be revitalized and reactivated. Most contributors demonstrate an impressive ambi-dexterity: while they are conversant with the latest trends in Western scholarship, their own location as Gandhian intellectuals is never compromised. That the contributors are, to use a phrase from Mrinal Miri's Welcome, 'some of the finest minds of the country,' only underscores the gradual but sure return of the Indian mind to Gandhi and to tradition. As the century nears its end, it is becoming increasingly clear to our intellectual establishment that the answers lie not in the second-hand knowledge systems which we import so compulsively from the West, but in a careful examination and renewal of the sustaining resources of tradition of which Gandhi, in recent times, is such an important representative and exemplar.

This book begins with an incisive and far-reaching Welcome address. In it Miri pithily defines the contemporary crisis in terms of the devaluation of eternal values, the separation of practical rationality from the practice of virtues, the phenomenal increase of violence against humanity, nature, and the cosmic order, and the attempt to find illusory solidarity in fragmentary and exclusive identities. He goes on to identify *swadharma, swaraj, ahimsa, satyagraha, purushartha*, and *yugadharma* as the key elements of a tradition to which Gandhi belonged and from which he mounted his attack on modernity. For Miri, the challenge for us is to show that a Gandhian critique is possible and, then, to appraise it critically.

The Welcome is followed by the brief Inaugural Remarks of S. Gopal and Ramashsray Roy's excellent summary of presented papers in his Introduction. After this come the eleven papers which make up the best portion of the book. The contributors, include K. J. Shah, A. K. Saran, Amlan Datta, C. D. Narasimhaiah, Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea, K. Raghavendra Rao, Thomas Pantham, Ramachandra Guha, A. Raghuramaraju, D. R. Nagaraj and Ramashray Roy himself.

D.R. Nagaraj in his essay, 'A Tibetan Dog, The Silent Sadhus and Peasants of Champaran: Notes on Violence, Non-Violence and Counter- Violence in Gandhi' argues that Gandhi's philosophy of violence is 'nothing but a spiritual analysis of the phenomenon of fear.' For Nagaraj, there is a hierarchical, incremental relationship between violence, counter-violence, and non-violence, in Gandhi's thought. Passive resistance, thus, is akin to counter-violence, the weapon of the weak, whereas genuine non-violence is for the strong, for those who are fearless and brave.

In 'Globalising Gandhi against Global Crisis: Perils and Problems,' K. Raghavendra Rao sums up his own understanding of Gandhian epistemology in nine pairs of 'apparently opposed but essentially related' terms: permanent-contingent, spirit-letter, theory-practice, absolute-relative, abstract-concrete, whole-part, language-reality (or signifier-signified), symbol-substance, ideal-existential, and universal-local. Rao argues that 'Theory for Gandhi is not so much an empirical-descriptive category as a moral prescriptive category.' Rao then uses this framework to redescribe the problems facing humanity which Paul Kennedy so persuasively identifies in *Preparing for the Twentieth Century*.

A. Raghuramaraju concentrates on the internal colonization of the West by modernity, arguing that such a reading needs to be incorporated into a Gandhian framework. Thomas Pantham vigorously refutes Partha Chatterjee's characterization of the Gandhian critique as 'being informed by a traditional pre-capitalist, peasant-communal ideology or moralism which lies *entirely outside* the thematic of post-Enlightenment thought.' He argues, instead, that Gandhi's critique of modernity is trans-liberal, decolonizing or post-colonizing: It combines aspects of 'modern, deontological, universal morality' with those 'of an hermeneutical-ontological or contextual/historical ethics of love and caring.'

Roy locates the modern crisis in an act of *hubris* which removes man from the spiritual ground of his being and gives him the illusion of autonomy. Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea makes a distinction between words and action in Gandhian praxis, pointing out how 'action for Gandhi was not only the test of his truth,' but 'an important means of enabling his fellow actors to *release* the knowledge or recognition of truth.' Ramachandra Guha in a well-researched and persuasive essay evaluates to what extent Gandhi may be justifiably considered the father of the modern environmental movement.

The book ends with transcripts of three important oral presentations by Amlan Datta, A. K. Saran and K. J. Shah. For Datta modernity spreads with industrialization, which in turn is necessitated by the defence requirements of nations. Saran argues that the Gandhian struggle was, by its very nature, not national but international: 'Gandhi's mission was universal, it was world-wide, civilisational.' Finally, Shah contends that Gandhian thought is best understood not in the framework of *ahimsa*, but of the *purusharthas*.

In the foregoing overview, I have tried to provide a glimpse into the enormous intellectual riches in this book. It would, of course, not be possible to take issue with individual essays here, but it is obvious that several of the points that have been raised need further debate, elaboration, and discussion. I would only like to raise one issue: should a team project on Gandhi genuflect to reigning Western intellectual fashions before it can find its own independent agenda? Is there no other way? Isn't such an exercise only a further proof of our continued cultural subservience and minority? Are we not turning to Gandhi because we are afraid that without him we may become irrelevant? In other words, are we discussing Gandhi only because we cannot be Gandhi-like ourselves? Of course, I agree that discussing Gandhi is better than not discussing him; yet, is it enough?

Before ending I must complain against the poor proof-reading which mars every other page of this valuable book. If the Institute is to be taken seriously as a publisher, it cannot allow so many errors to go uncorrected. Similarly, Roy's Introduction, which ends abruptly, leaves out quite a few essays published, while discussing one which has not been included. It is also a pity that some of the participants of the seminar, probably because they did not turn in their papers, go unrepresented in this book.

MAKARAND PARANJAPE is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.

The Government or the Market?

Vivek Srivastava

PARADIGMS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

by Arun Ghosh

Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996, xii + 128 pp., Rs. 180.

In this book Arun Ghosh presents his 'vision' of the direction in which India should develop and offers a framework for economic policy design which he believes to be consistent with this vision. With the reform process that was initiated in 1991, the development strategy that had been adopted by Indian planners in the 1950s has undergone some significant changes. As is well known, the reforms have been directed at reducing government intervention and control in various areas of economic activity. This change in policy has generated considerable debate. A major concern of some of those who are opposed to the direction India's economic policy has recently taken is that a market-oriented strategy is biased in favour of the rich and is not suitable for improving the lot of India's poor. Arun Ghosh shares this view. To arrive at his conclusions about the most appropriate development path for India he attempts 'to unravel some of the important mainstream strands of economic thought bearing on the issue of economic development'.

A major part of the book is dedicated to tracing the evolution of those elements in economic thought which the author feels are relevant for arriving at an answer to the problems of economic development in the context of present day problems and constraints. The author begins with a discussion of the classical economists - Smith, Ricardo and Marx - and moves on to discuss the change in economic thinking came with the 'marginalists' - Walras, Jevon and Menger. From a discussion of Wicksell's and Schumpeter's theories of the interest rate the author reaches the conclusion that the real rate of interest in an economy is bound from above by the growth of productivity in the economy and that, for the same reason, a developing country needs to be careful about the rate of interest on its external borrowing.

It is with Kalecki's concern with full employment and equitable growth and his prescription for developing countries that Arun Ghosh appears to have the greatest empathy. Kalecki was concerned that economic development might be to the disadvantage of the poor because of opposition from the rich. He was, therefore, of the view that investment needed to be planned so that it was correctly allocated between the production of essential wage goods, non-essentials and capital goods; that investment should be stepped up by cutting back on the consumption of luxuries; and that investment should be in labour-intensive activities.

The discussion on Kalecki is followed by a long chapter on how thinking on development issues evolved in the post-war period. The so called 'structuralists', as is well-known, made a case for state intervention. Around this same time Raul Prebisch made the well-known case for protection based on the infant-industry argument, which provided justification for the strategy of import substitution which was followed by India till very recently. Ghosh's discussion of neo-classical and what he refers to as 'neo-liberal' thought reveals his bias in favour of the view that governments can, in certain circumstances, be effective substitutes for the market. He rejects the argument that the market can achieve an efficient allocation of resources on the ground that the assumptions of neo-classical general equilibrium theory do not obtain in developing economies. He rejects the arguments in favour of fiscal and monetary restraint, the avoidance of quantitative restrictions and price controls, productivity linked wages and reduced government involvement in production and investment activities, on the ground that there 'exist many excellent reviews of the failure of these policies in country after country' (p. 58). Unfortunately the reader is not provided with any example of this, nor is the assertion balanced with a review of the experience of state planning in Eastern Europe and the erstwhile Soviet Union. The deficiencies in India's development strategy are attributed to failures in implementation rather than shortcomings in the policy itself. And finally, the case for less government is interpreted as being an argument in favour of anarchy!

Although Ghosh grudgingly acknowledges that 'the benefits of international trade, of international exchanges in the arena of knowledge, of science, of technology, cannot be denied...' (p. 72), he provides a word of caution. He asserts that the growing influence of international finance capital makes it difficult for countries to follow independent economic policies, and suggests that external finance may be too expensive for developing countries. He draws attention to the potential threat from the hegemony of Transnational Corporations and to the fact that modern - capital and skill intensive - technologies tend to replace labour and exacerbate the problem of unemployment .

It is against this backdrop that Ghosh presents his framework for egalitarian and broad-based development. He draws his inspiration from the writings of Kalecki and from the experience of China. He believes that any 'vision' of India's future must be consistent with the Directive Principles of the Constitution. For achieving wide-spread rural development he advocates local watershed area development planning. Based on China's example, he sees the effective mobilization of under-employed labour as a means of partially bridging the real resource gap. The financial resource constraint, in his view, can be alleviated by reducing tax evasion, higher taxes on the rich, mopping up black money and more prudent spending on the part of government. He believes that the State must continue to finance investments in infrastructure, basic intermediates and key industries and that ownership in these areas must remain with (reformed) public enterprises. He is confident that these policies can be successful in today's India because there is a new awakening among the people and 'as a result, this new ferment *can* be transformed into organized effort if a people-centric development programme can be charted out, with the entire populace voluntarily accepting and co-operating in the development effort' (p. 94). An important pre-requisite for the success of his prescription is democratic decentralization and genuine empowerment of the people.

There can be no dispute with the view that development must be egalitarian and participative, as also with the view that there is a need for genuine decentralized democracy and that this would ensure better utilization of the State's resources. What is surprising is Ghosh's continued faith in the ability of government, albeit through reformed public enterprises, to efficiently provide infrastructure and other basic goods. Transferring ownership to public institutions, local bodies and co-operatives is not likely to solve the problem. These entities are subject to the same pulls and pressures as are the public enterprises of today. It is also difficult to understand why Ghosh believes that financing of investments in infrastructure and other key areas must remain in the exclusive domain of the government. It is nobody's case that these areas should be exclusively financed by private capital. However, private capital can be effectively used to supplement and complement public funds. That the Government of India has in some cases offered unjustifiably high returns to private (foreign) capital might suggest a deficiency in government decision-making but does not provide an argument against private capital. Although effective empowerment of the people and democratic decentralization are central to Ghosh's thesis he does not address the important question of how this is to be achieved. Effective implementation of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system would have been a step in this direction but, as is well known, most state governments made a mockery of the exercise of devolving powers to these institutions.

Thus, Ghosh gives us a model which continues to envisage a major role for government. In his model effective checks are provided through the creation of a genuine democracy with an empowered polity. The question of how this might be achieved in the existing situation is left unanswered. He accepts that India's development will continue to be dualistic while the work force is gradually transferred from labour-intensive areas of employment to steadily higher-productivity employment. Given this, it is not obvious why democratically decentralized rural development cannot be consistent with a market-driven modern sector and a government that devotes itself to providing education, health, social security and law and order and to reducing social inequities.

VIVEK SRIVASTAVA, Director of Industries, Himachal Pradesh Government, is the author of *Liberalization, Productivity and Competition: A Panel Study of Indian Manufacturing* (Delhi: Oxford, 1995).

Decentralization? The Asian Experience

Birinder Pal Singh

DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE IN ASIAN COUNTRIES
Edited by Abdul Aziz and David D. Arnold
New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, 301 pp, Rs. 375

Decentralized Governance in Asian Countries is a collection of twelve papers and a keynote address originally commissioned for an 'Asia regional seminar' on this theme. The introduction, a customary overview and the conclusion make a total of fifteen chapters which seek to address the success of decentralization initiatives in contributing to the furthering of democracy and development in Asian countries. The editors of this volume, a Professor of Economics and a representative of the Ford Foundation, claim to make a comparative assessment of the experience of several countries in the region with these initiatives, thus providing an early feedback regarding their performance with respect to political and socio-economic objectives.

The contributors to this volume include scholars, policy makers and administrators from six countries in the region - Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, China and the Philippines. The volume contains two papers on each country - an overview and a 'field-paper'. While the overview presents a descriptive historical account of local self-government and institutions in the country, the 'field-paper' provides a micro-level assessment of actual governance at the grassroots level. The editors frankly acknowledge the gap which has emerged between these two levels in various studies on decentralization that seek to address issues as varied as the representative character of decentralized bodies, their political and financial autonomy, integration of decentralized institutions into the state governance system, and the extent to which these bodies have promoted democratic and development values.

The present volume has been intended as a contribution to 'an understanding of the third-world perspective on the subject'. In the words of the editors, 'one of the striking features of decentralized governance in Asia is that all the six countries, notwithstanding their differences in governmental set-up and machineries, have made provisions in their constitutions to establish local government institutions' (p. 278). In the very next paragraph they note: 'owing to the limited autonomy enjoyed by the decentralized governments, these institutions by and large have been reduced to the position of instruments or agents of state governments instead of functioning as decentralized units or levels of governments' (p. 279). Country experiences show that the powers delegated to them have not been commensurate with the responsibilities given, thus raising doubts about the possibility of infusing democratic values at the grassroots level.

The two passages cited above provide the essence of the whole debate on decentralized governance. The first one suggests the framework of this intellectual endeavour. I would call this the 'public-administration approach' - it considers the constitution of a country as a 'sacred' embodiment of laws and statutes which are believed to govern the administrative institutions truly in letter and spirit. This streak runs through all the papers except the keynote address. Most of the contributors consider the incorporation of certain amendments in the constitution, the establishment of some new institutions, or even a declaration to that effect as significant positive developments towards decentralized governance. Hence the frequent use of phrases such as 'everybody takes part in decision-making process', 'all citizens have access to', and 'access of all people to' - to mention a few examples. Being an outsider to the discipline of public administration, I fail to appreciate how 'all people' can ever take part in the decision- making processes in their countries under the existing conditions.

This means that an understanding of the nature of the state and the political system operating in each country would go a long way in providing explanations to the lacunae in existing constitutions and to the non-implementation of provisions enshrined in them. Otherwise, how do we make sense of the incorporation of the concept 'socialist' in the Preamble of the Indian constitution during the peak years of the Emergency? An explanation of such developments would need to address their intrinsic linkage to the nature of the state. This is true of all countries included in this study. It would be no exaggeration to state that the political systems in all of them have expropriated more powers to themselves, directly or indirectly, than devolving power to the people or to local self-governments.

Decentralized Governance would have been a richer volume if the 'overview papers' for individual countries had presented a theoretical framework to contextualize the *problématique* of decentralized governance in the socio-economic and historical specificity of each country. This lacuna appears more glaring since the keynote address by Rajni Kothari opens with a suggestion to view decentralization 'in the context of an emerging need to reconcile two contrary tendencies: globalization on the one hand and local self-governance on the other' (p. 34). He sees 'decentralization as a clear counter to the processes of homogenization, globalization, modernization, liberalization and privatization' (p. 40). This formulation is clearly at variance with the notion of the modern nation-state conspicuous in all the papers collected in this volume.

Most contributors to the volume thus see decentralization as a 'boon from above', a grant from the central authority which is characteristic of a mature, civilized and benevolent state. Incidentally, this argument is most clearly made by the two papers from China. Zhenyao suggests that the 'empowerment of the people ... entails multi-faceted political training. Only when people enjoy a wider scope of democratic rights can a foundation exist for the central government to transfer power down to the local people' (p. 102). In the 'field-paper' on China, Guoying and Houan hold the implementation of the 'organic law' of Villagers' Committees in the Lishu county responsible for the success story of local governance.

Sivanna and Aziz, while summing up, write in the last paragraph of the volume: 'governments at the higher level should take necessary steps to create an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of full-fledged local government systems with a genuine devolution of powers and resources' (p. 288). It is interesting to note that this suggestion to governments follows the findings of most of the contributors that the self-government institutions 'by and large have been reduced to the position of instruments or agents of state governments' (p. 279). They also note that 'the reluctance of many governments to give these institutions the required degree of autonomy raises some doubts and questions: Is there any real dichotomy between decentralized governance and national unity and integrity? Or, is it just an alibi for not devolving powers to people?' (p. 279). Unfortunately, these doubts and queries have not adequately been addressed in the text.

In his paper on the performance of local self-government in India, Mathew records that 'Panchayats have not blossomed into "units of self-government"' (p. 142), since they are dominated by the economically and socially privileged classes. Amongst others, the elected representatives in the state legislatures and the parliament are fearful of the rise of Panchayati Raj in the country. This is in tune with the increasing centralization of political power in India. The invocation of the notion of Panchayati Raj in the last decade was arguably an attempt to bring such bodies directly under the control of the centre, thus marginalizing the state governments as well as regional and local leaders.

It is important to address such crucial paradoxes in the theory and practice of decentralized governance. This problem is not confined to India, but pertains to many other Asian countries as well. In her most recent book, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge, 1995), Jalal notes that inclusive politics in the formally-democratic India and the politics of exclusivism in the military-bureaucratic Pakistan have been only marginally different in addressing problems of economic deprivation and disparity. This paradox can be found not only in the political realm, but also in the economic and ecological realms. The opening up of these hitherto 'planned' economies towards the end of the twentieth century, the coming together of nation-states in the wake of globalization and communication-networking in an information society, and the break up of the Soviet Union are among the factors which add to the complexity of the problem of decentralized governance, since each of them, directly or indirectly, influences local and national politics with serious consequences for local self-governments.

BIRINDER PAL SINGH teaches Sociology at Punjabi University, Patiala.

The Subaltern's Ninth Incarnation

Dilip M. Menon

SUBALTERN STUDIES IX:
WRITINGS ON SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY AND SOCIETY
edited by Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty
Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, x + 284 pp., Rs. 475.

The ninth incarnation of the subaltern is at hand. When the idea first surfaced over a decade ago, it encompassed only peasants and tribals and sought to recover their lives from the benign paternalism of nationalist histories and the criminal stereotyping of colonial records. Over time, burrowing in the archives and reading dominant texts against the grain has been slowly abandoned (with honourable exceptions) for mirror gazing. The Bengali *bhadralok* at the heart of the subaltern project have cast the subaltern in their own image: as selves fractured by the blows of colonial modernity which attempt to recover authenticity through the creation of pristine spaces of native autonomy. Subalternity has come to refer to a state of mind rather than a subordinate level of existence. An increasing engagement with texts rather than lives has widened the disciplinary engagement beyond history, notably towards literary theory. A major consequence of this is a tendency to perceive reality as produced by, and located at the interstices of contending representations. Another tendency stems from an unproblematic reading of Foucault. Ironically for a project which began with the aim of recovering individual agency, there is an uncritical characterization of the ability of monolithic discourses - colonial or post-colonial - to define and marginalize individuals and groups. So to the question 'who is the subaltern?', the answer is that it depends on what you are reading. A new twist to 'have you read any good books lately?'.

There have been two major silences within the subaltern project: gender and caste. Kamala Visweswaran in her essay on women's participation in the nationalist movement, begins with a forceful critique of Partha Chatterjee's formulation of the nationalist resolution of the women's question. She demonstrates how his position that Indian men compensated for their displacement in the colonial public sphere by recasting the domestic space as an area where they exercised control does not break with the colonial discourse that he analyses. The colonial strategy with regard to the political participation of women in the nationalist movement was to attribute their actions to domestic influence: the impact of their husbands. Colonial authorities worked with a certain perception of women; they preferred not to lathi charge them, and levied fines rather than sentencing them to prison. Once in prison, their status and living conditions were inflected by their perceived 'intrinsic' connection to the men in their lives. The wearing of white *saris* in prison came under attack, as an imposed sign of widowhood 'during the lifetime of their husbands'. While classifying female prisoners their status was dependent on the worldly rank of their husbands or fathers. Apart from these attitudes is the tendency of historians to subsume the category of gender under caste or class identities. Visweswaran raises the important question of how one is to recover the experience of women from the existing records. If one considers speech as agency it could mean a privileging of the middle class woman over the lower class/caste woman; even as one entity is retrieved, another is erased. After this, it is surprising to see Ranajit Guha's essay titled 'The Small Voice of History', a rather belated and simplistic engagement with the issue of gender by stating that women's agency can be restored through recognizing their voices.

The Bengali *bhadralok* at the heart of the subaltern project have cast the subaltern in their own image: as selves fractured by the blows of colonial modernity which attempt to recover authenticity through the creation of pristine spaces of native autonomy. Subalternity has come to refer to a state of mind rather than a subordinate level of existence.

Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana look at the issues raised for feminist theory by the increased visibility of women in contemporary political agitations. In the violent protests following the imminent implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal report, women appear as equal partners rioting alongside men. However, the authors point to two significant characterizations of this participation. One, women are seen as a 'moral' force which depoliticizes their intervention and second, they are defined as against the lower caste man. Again as one layer of subalternity expresses itself another is silenced. The participation of women in the anti-arrack agitations is rendered non-political in another way by seeing such protests as an expression of their essential roles as wives and mothers. Another dilemma is raised by the rhetoric of contraception; the manufacturers of dangerous drugs like Norplant and abortifacients present these as options for women making sovereign choices about their lives and health. As the authors point out, this limited idea of freedom is restricted to the private domain of the family. Moreover, these drugs are designed less for the middle class citizens and more for the lower classes who are more often than not coerced into acceptance. Both these essays constitute an advance for the subaltern studies project by putting forward nuanced initial formulations to expand the notion of subalternity and begin an engagement with issues of gender.

Caste, the other lacuna in the subaltern corpus, is stridently and polemically addressed by Kancha Ilaiah in his essay on the opposed worlds of the Dalit Bahujan and the Brahmin. He intends his work to act as a 'shock treatment' and therefore dispenses with the need for 'nuanced statements', which can occasionally mean that what he says flies in the face of current wisdom. The essay is written as a series of oppositions: the production-based epistemology of the Dalit Bahujan and the religion-based world-view of the Brahmin; sexual freedom vs. sexual repression; greater freedom of women vs. lesser freedom; common property vs. private property and so on. Away from these simplistic distinctions, the essay comes into its own when Ilaiah speaks about the variance between the bare lives of the Kurumas and what is taught to them at school, and in some sharp digs at Brahmins. However, the problems with this essay far outweigh any insights it may have to offer. The idea that Dalit Bahujans and Brahmins occupy distinct, water-tight universes is too facile. Through shared, even if hierarchical interaction in productive and religious spheres over centuries, there has been a considerable traffic in ideas. Besides, even within the Dalit Bahujan (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes) there may be mutually incompatible visions of the world. Ilaiah argues for a greater freedom experienced by Dalit Bahujan women which makes them more complete social and political beings than their Brahmin counterparts (even Dalit goddesses are free of male control). However, in the face of real inequalities between men and women within the community he comes up with the cumbersome idea of 'Dalit patriarchal democracy' which can encompass both equality as well as its opposite. This essay gives an account of Dalit life such as a Western anthropologist smitten by the idea of the noble savage may have written. Going back to Ranajit Guha's essay, one feels that much of Ilaiah's vitriol against Brahmin knowledge may be justified. Guha points to petitions submitted by peasants in Bengal to Brahmin priests appealing for relief from leprosy and asthma to argue against the view that colonialism managed to subjugate the bodies of the colonized to the disciplines of medicine and hygiene. Physical illness and spiritual shortcomings

were equated in their appeal for *prayascitta*: a fact which proves to Guha that the 'clinical gaze' had not triumphed. The question of the domination of Brahminical knowledge goes abegging in this celebration of spheres untainted by colonialism.

Gyan Prakash challenges the view that colonialism ensured the victory of the discourse of science. He shares with Guha the idea that indigenous intellectual discourse showed resistance in the face of colonial knowledge. The essay begins with a discussion of a text on astronomy called *Bhugolsar* written in 1841 which compares the Copernican system with the world delineated in the *puranas*. While the author, Omkar Bhatt, shows that the truth of the white man is more compelling, accessible and powerful, the process of translation of ideas generates tensions. For example, the need for the acquisition of scientific knowledge is very often buttressed by traditional concerns of attaining freedom from vices like greed, desire and anger. Again, a scientific approach comes to be deployed in a defence of a revivified indigenous religion, as in the Bengal Renaissance or by the Arya Samaj, albeit in different ways. As Gyan Prakash puts it, in matters like the evolution of attitudes towards diet, the authority of science emerged in the language of ancestral reason. In the interaction between traditional wisdom and 'science', he proposes a model of hybridity, as modernity '[loses] itself in the otherness it sought to appropriate'. The essay addresses itself entirely to questions of the knowledge of native elites. What happens to the knowledge of subaltern groups under the impact of both the new discourse of science as well as the modified discourse of traditional elite knowledge? How far was this modified knowledge used to further the hegemony of traditional elites? A more complex notion is needed here rather than the one the author puts forward of 'repressed knowledges and subjects returning as figures of subalternity' in the interface between colonial science and tradition.

Gyan Prakash's concentration on the subalternization of traditional elite knowledge, albeit contested and incomplete, functions at the level of discourse alone without much reference to the faultiness within society. Vivek Dhareshwar and Srivathsan's essay on the creation of the figure of the 'rowdy' as the 'other' of the bourgeois citizen operates at the same level but is more problematic. Locating the 'rowdy' within official discourse alone rather than within the social grid or community of which he is a part provides only a skewed picture. A 'rowdy' is neither the creation, nor the figment of a Manichaean, disciplining discourse alone, he is engendered as well by the real violence and the absence of 'law' at the interstices of state and civil society. While the abstract point about the state's discourse of law and order and the imagining of the ideal law-abiding citizen is well-taken, there are several problems with the essay which arise from an easy elision of the trajectory of a discourse and what its actual effects are. The difficulty the authors had in extracting any information about the presence and activities of rowdies in neighbourhoods shows the distance between life as experienced by the interviewees and the need for the authors to make a political gesture. For example, when they say that the reluctance to answer questions may have stemmed from the fact that the interview was formally similar to other 'disciplinary structures' like examination papers, parental interrogations and police beatings it is very difficult to see what they are getting at. Moreover, when they discount the distinctions their respondents make between rowdies and those who are community toughs, the authors for some reason see this as a result of the 'penetration by our discourse of morality'. That it is not only the abstract discourse of citizenship which defines a rowdy but actual relations within communities is too obvious a point to be expanded on here.

After this it is a relief to turn to the essay by Shail Mayaram on the violence of Partition in the Mewat region inflicted by the Hindus on the Meos who came to be defined solely as Muslims. Mayaram traces the growth of Hindu chauvinist organizations in Alwar and Bharatpur as well as the slow build-up of tensions and the closure of options with swift and telling strokes. The actual account of the violence, told in the chilling, unemotional words of the participants, are a revelation. A former captain of the Alwar army says: 'we had orders to clear them. Not a single Muslim was left in Alwar. Alwar was the first state to clear all Muslims'. From the mimetic attacks on Muslims in response to rumours from Pakistan, to the force feeding of pork to Muslim men, and the strafing from the air by government planes of refugees at Kala Pahar, this is new and stunning information from a little-studied region. Parallel to state-sponsored extermination campaigns was the 'extraordinary capacity of the subaltern for violence'. Shail Mayaram points to the rationalization of violence by the Hindus both as a moral crusade as well as counter-violence against Muslim provocation. And, at the end of the massacre is the silence as there is the breakdown of traditional forms of mythic history: the Partition generates no ballads. Here again the issue of the recovery of speech comes up, as it does in Kamala Visweswaran's and Susie Tharu's essays.

Ajay Skaria looks at the different meanings of orality and writing in the Dangs, and convincingly argues against both Eurocentric valorization of writing as an index of civilization as well as a privileging of the 'immmediacy' of orality. He argues that though writing was perceived by the *adivasis* as powerful plains technology, nevertheless a written agreement was regarded as no more sacrosanct than an oral one. Moreover, written agreement was seen as more threatening than an oral one because of the 'uncontrollable surplus of meaning' that it generated. In the conversion of protection money or *giras* to annual payments, or the creation of official lists of chiefs, the written document could be set aside, and a new consensus created within the community. Writing *per se* was not powerful, it was the association of colonial power with it that made it so. As Ajay tellingly puts it, colonial domination made the entry of *adivasis* into the interpretive community impossible; the latter could no longer generate or negotiate new meanings. It was this particular powerlessness that made them illiterate, in the same sense that the last surviving speaker of a forgotten language is effectively dumb. The colonial moment produced the fetishization of writing as it became increasingly difficult to absorb it as a marker in the symbolic hierarchy of chiefly power. In its powerful combination of historical detail, material reality and theoretical sophistication (there is a running critique of Derrida for his disassociation of writing from questions of power) this essay is an example of subaltern history at its best.

This volume of subaltern studies is to be welcomed for its attempt at broadening the disciplinary engagement of the project and for taking up issues like caste and gender which had hitherto been sidestepped. David Lloyd's essay on the 'subalternity effect' points to the way forward. His insistence that social history must see both marginal as well as dominant social forms as contemporaneous, in the sense that the former is never erased by the operation of power, is salutary. Popular memory and its forms must be seen as a repository of images that, to use Benjamin's phrase, flash up in a moment of danger. And it is here that subalterns enter the stage of history.

DILIP M. MENON is Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

This volume of subaltern studies is to be welcomed for its attempt at broadening the disciplinary engagement of the project and for taking up issues like caste and gender which had hitherto been sidestepped. David Lloyd's essay on the 'subalternity effect' points to the way forward. His insistence that social history must see both marginal as well as dominant social forms as contemporaneous, in the sense that the former is never erased by the operation of power, is salutary.

Institutionalized 'Differences'

Tilottoma Misra

WOMEN AND LAW IN COLONIAL INDIA: A SOCIAL HISTORY
by Janaki Nair

New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996, x + 259 pp., Rs. 300.

The recent feminist debate centered round the issue of a gender-just uniform civil code has brought to focus certain significant questions that touch upon the very nature of the legal system which has been traditionally represented as absolutely neutral. But the scales of law have been known to be manipulated through the centuries to suit the needs of the dominant ideology. The Muslim Women's Act of 1986 merely foregrounded the patriarchal bias that has been embedded in the legal structure since the colonial days and before. The demand for a uniform civil code which has been made by the feminists as well as by political parties with diverse ideologies have made it even more imperative for the former to build up their case on the basis of a clear understanding of the economic and political interests that have gone into the colonial period when the foundations of the modern Indian legal structure were laid. Such a study, and not sporadic reactions to the agendas of political parties, would go a long way in giving a firm basis to the feminist demand for a gender-just legal system.

Taking feminist legal theory and historiography as the framework of her book, Janaki Nair has traced the process by which the foundation of the modern Indian legal system was laid during the colonial period by the codification of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' laws. The complex nature of the customary laws had so perplexed the colonial lawmakers that, according to Nair, in their attempt at homogenization of Hindu and Muslim laws they effected a Brahmanization and Islamization of Indian law at the expense of customary laws. The codified 'Gentoo' law was based on the authority of any written text that went by the name of *sastra*, while the unwritten customary laws of those communities that had existed beyond the fold of the Hindu or Muslim patrlineal societies, were disregarded in the framing of laws. The enactment of laws to curtail the property rights of the matrilineal Nayar women and of the Muslim women of those communities of the Malabar coast who had continued to follow matrilineal practices despite conversion, serves as a pointer to the economic interests and patriarchal bias of the colonial lawmakers. Janaki Nair, however, refers to the danger of idealizing all customary laws as favourable to women: 'customs were after all also devised and sustained by male community elders, and women were rarely consulted in such formulations.' (p. 34)

The author also discerns the contradictions inherent in the colonial law in its definition of the rights of women. While it sought to deliver women from some oppressive social practices, it also ensured the strengthening and continuity of the patriarchal structure that operated through the family laws. The distinction that was maintained by the colonial authorities between 'personal' and 'public' laws in order to sustain the policy of least interference in those spheres of civil life that did not directly affect their economic interests, proved detrimental to the interests of Indian women.

The book brings into focus another significant aspect of colonial attitudes. In order to highlight the 'depravity' of the Indians as compared to the 'civilized' cultural practices of the rulers, the colonial authorities singled out for special attention only the most extraordinary cultural practices of the Indians which were by no means the most rampant ones. Thus, thousands of parliamentary papers were produced on the subject of *sati*, while the millions of deaths from disease and starvation, often because of the inhuman nature of the colonial exploitative machinery, went unrecorded (p. 54). Even in the matter of *sati*, the manner in which they dragged their feet over the issue for many years displayed the lack of genuine concern for the victims. At one stage in the process of enacting the anti-*sati* laws, the 'voluntary' self-immolation by 'good' *satis* was considered a legitimate religious practice of the Hindus that should be kept out of the purview of colonial law. Only the cases of forced *sati* were singled out for legal action. In recent times, another macabre event was sought to be covered up by adopting the same subterfuge of appealing to the claims of female 'volition'. When feminist groups and a large number of enlightened individuals expressed their shock and indignation at the burning alive of a young widow on her husband's pyre at Deorala village, the fundamentalists blantantly declared that 'voluntary' self-immolation by a widow has the sanction of sacred tradition. Nair brings out the conspiracy behind such attempts to prove that 'the woman is an untrammeled subject, freely exercising her will' (p. 240).

In the chapter entitled 'Social Reform and the Women's Question', the author brings out the contradictory pulls between 'tradition' and 'modernity' that characterized the colonial attitude towards social reforms. In order to protect its economic interests, the colonial state often gave a new lease of life to obsolete traditions within modern institutions like law. The revival of the *karewa* custom in Punjab in order to prevent alienation of property by widows has been cited as a case in point. This ambiguity can be noticed even in the great Indian reformers of the nineteenth century. The 'nationalist patriarchy' often resisted reforms in the domestic sphere on the plea that it was the only uncolonized space that must be protected from state interference. Nair discusses the case of a young Maharashtrian woman, Rakhmabai, who refused to go and live with her husband who was illiterate, diseased and leading an immoral life. When this case came up to the court, a large section of Indian males including national leaders like Tilak supported the husband and sought the help of the colonial authorities to protect the patriarchal rights. The latter too, though normally reluctant to interfere in the 'domestic sphere', readily stepped in this case to assert male conjugal rights.

In the chapter on 'Labour Legislation and the Woman Worker', the deplorable condition of working class women, especially of those working in plantations and mines during the colonial period, is discussed. The legislations made throughout the British period were guided primarily by the needs of the colonial machinery to function well rather than by any concern for the welfare of the workers as human beings. In the case of the women workers the tendency was to regard them as animals while enacting maternity benefit laws. Middle class concepts of morality and immorality rather than consideration for the health of workers dominated the debate on improving the working conditions of female miners and plantation workers. This insensitivity was evident even in the resolutions adopted by the different Indian women's organizations of the nationalist phase which were dominated by educated middle-class women. Nair comments: 'those who took active part in the broader national movement and purported to speak for all of Indian womanhood, primarily represented the interests of the propertied and educated elite' (p. 197). Unfortunately, this holds true in the case of many women's organizations even today.

The chapters on 'Personal Laws and Women' and 'Developments since Independence' deal with some of the burning issues that concern our times. The gradual but important changes brought about in the pre- and post-Independence period through legislations that guaranteed several important rights to Hindu women in the domestic sphere have been highlighted in these chapters. The political exigencies that have allowed minority rights to triumph over women's rights, the gender injustices embedded in the Indian society that have even today led to the framing of laws prejudicial to women, the conflict between the concept of a pluralist society and feminism - these are some of the important topics discussed by the author.

On the whole, the book is a significant contribution to the study of the historical roots of a variety of issues that concern us today. The author has supplied a wealth of material that can be utilised by feminists to strengthen their struggle for a gender-just law. Though legal remedies against social oppression are held up as effective only up to a certain extent, Nair agrees with the feminist agenda of a total social transformation which alone can ensure legal and social equality in the country. Attractively produced and moderately priced, this book is a valuable addition to the wide range of books on women's issues being brought out by Kali for Women. But, one last word - why are there no indexes in their publications?

Tilottoma Misra is Professor of English Literature at the University of Dibrugarh.

The Divine Feminine in the Brahmanical Tradition

S. Preetha Nair and Sanjoy Mallik

SAPTAMATRKA WORSHIP AND SCULPTURES:
AN ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS IN THE STORIED BRAHMANICAL ICONS
by Shivaji K. Panikkar
New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1997, xxvi + 301 pp., 196 black and white illustrations, Rs. 1500.

Shivaji K. Pannikar's recent publication is an art-historical study of the *saptamatrka* worship and its related manifestations in the sculptural art of India. Brahmanical theology defines the *saptamatrka* as the *sakti* (energy) potentials of seven deities from its pantheon, personified in the female gender. While *matrka* as a generic term implies the maternal potential, puranic myths predominantly narrate them as militant goddesses of the battlefield. Panikkar observes that although the *saptamatrka* are never portrayed in the narrative mode in sculpture, they are often presented as holding *ayudhas* (war-props). Nonetheless, on the whole, they appear as icons of motherly compassion. His investigation begins from this feature, that the *saptamatrka* present a dichotomous personality - simultaneously benign and fierce.

The book consists of seven chapters. The first three chapters primarily deal with locating prefigurations of the *saptamatrka* in the proto-historic Indus Valley civilization, in the Vedic literary tradition, and in the art of the Kushana period, while the concept of the *heptad* is traced through literary and inscriptional evidences. Chapters four to six are exclusively iconographic readings of sculptural material from the mid-sixth to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. In the final chapter, 'Iconology of *saptamatrkas*: Historical Perspective', the author situates the study within a broader socio-political and religious context.

The significance of the publication lies in its intention to approach the subject from a perspective different from that of conventional art-historical writing. This shift is effected through a consideration of the issue of gender - in the words of the author, the book 'incorporates a feminist theoretical frame of reference'. This leads to some insights that are very pertinent, especially into Brahmanical religion.

Beginning with the notion that the divine feminine in the Brahmanical tradition has been a male construct throughout its history, Panikkar goes on to explain how it received validation and legitimation within patriarchal kinship relations. Pointing out that fertility and death were the two body tropes used in representations of the divine feminine, he links this with them being typified in the roles of mother, wife, sister and lover on the one hand, and the fearsome Kali and Camunda on the other. Such a process of essentialization, the author argues, could be expected to have had implications for the social sphere of the female, and vice versa. Panikkar here reminds us that myths about women often illustrate how society viewed them at particular historical points.

Panikkar also shows how in the Vedic tradition the role of the goddess was insignificant and minor in comparison with the prominent position of male gods. Later, when the all-male Brahmanical triad of Brahma-Vishnu-Siva was standardized, despite the prevalence of the worship of the goddess in her warrior aspect as Durga, she played no major role in the prime cosmic functions. Much as it may appear to be an instance of relatively 'autonomous' power position, the myth of the origin of Durga, from the compounded anger of all the gods emerging in the form of *tejas* (light/energy), actually illustrates how she is willed into existence for coercive action against the *asura* in order to eventually restore the power of patriarchy. Patriarchal control is also evident in the myth of the birth of the god Skanda, where the taming of the malevolent tutelary goddesses of child-birth, the Balagrahas, are effected through their 'child' Skanda - the goddesses are unable to harm him, and seek his motherhood.

The logic of adopting a feminist theoretical framework is unfortunately not evident when the author discusses the iconography of the *saptamatrka* proper. The iconographic chapters in the book remain distinct from Panikkar's illuminating observations on theology and religion.

However, the logic of adopting a feminist theoretical framework is unfortunately not evident when the author discusses the iconography of the *saptamatrka* proper. The iconographic chapters in the book remain distinct from Panikkar's illuminating observations on theology and religion. Panikkar's use of feminist theory is confined to raising the issue of a gender-perspective; it does not attempt to effect a paradigm-shift in the concept of art history. Griselda Pollock, whom the author cites in the early pages of his book, argues that 'feminist art history should see itself ... not just as a novel art historical perspective, aiming to improve existing, but inadequate, art history. Feminist art history must engage in a *politics of knowledge*' (*Vision and Difference*, London, 1988, our emphasis). She elaborates the notion of a 'politics of knowledge' as the very way in which 'history operates, what structures society, how art is produced, what kind of social beings artists are' and argues that 'art history has its history as an ideological discourse'. The early chapters of *Vision and Difference* explain in detail how feminist interventions in histories of art operate in relation to the 'social history of art' paradigm. The notion of the gifted individual creating objects of aesthetic appreciation is seriously contested by the formulation that the object of art, like every other product, creates its domain of consumption in a production-consumption circuit. In the context of Panikkar's study, it would have been logical if the author had begun from a discussion of the modes of production - spelling out the dimensions of patron-client relations in what is obviously a guild-mode of art-activity. This is sadly absent, thus limiting the extent and scope of the feminist intervention in Panikkar's book.

We feel that it is not impossible to carry out an analysis of the sculptural/architectural projects in terms of their actual patrons and of the ways in which their demands were worked out by the guild. At least in one instance, in the discussion of the *matrka* group in cave number 16 at Ellora, this possibility was clearly at hand. This *matrka* group has a layout, as the author points out, which includes mortal figures, identified tentatively 'as the idealized portrait of the patron who sponsored the *yajnasala* project. R. Sengupta identifies these figures as the three queens of the Rashtrakuta king Govinda II, and suggests the identity of the central figure as Gamundabhe'. Given such an identification, however tentative, it is suprising that the political implications of such a panel are not addressed at all.

Finally, although the author expresses willingness to depart from a unilinear concept of history, this too is not evident in the book. The very act of seeking a 'prototype' as well as the classification into chronological periods of iconographic development seem to imply a silent and unquestioned acceptance of the very same notions of periodization as in conventional art history. Here, once again, we may turn to Griselda Pollock for an alternative: 'the term "regime of representation" is coined to describe the formation of visual codes and their institutional circulation as a decisive move against art history's patterns of periodization by style and movement .... In place of superficial stylistic differences structural similarities are foregrounded'.

Saptamatrka Worship and Sculptures is a splendid source book for students of art history, especially those keen on iconographic and iconological studies. The exhaustive collection of well-reproduced photographs illustrates almost all the icons cited by the author in his discussion. But one wishes that Panikkar had forged an organic unity between the iconographic and the iconological sections. This would have made this work more balanced.

S. Preetha Nair and Sanjoy Mallik are Research Fellows at the Department of Art history and Aesthetics, Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University of Baroda.

Beyond The Confusion Of Tongues

Franson D. Manjali

THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT LANGUAGE
by Umberto Eco
Series: The Making of Europe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; x + 385 pp., price not stated.

Eco's book provides a rather timely exposition of what may be historically one of the most obsessive pursuits in European scholarship - a perfect language. Eco is sensitive to the context of what the Series Editor, Jacques Le Goff perceives as increasing European unity, which calls for an overcoming of linguistic barriers. Massive research programmes set up in the last couple of decades in artificial intelligence, logically a not-too-distant cousin of the perfect language project, is the other context in which Eco's erudite and witty account of similar past experiences is equally relevant.

The founding book of the Judeo-Christian religions had spoken of a site where God's wrath led to the 'confusion of tongues', *confusio linguarum*, shattering the original, Adamic linguistic utopia. What language Adam spoke was always a matter of speculation, but Eco notes that it was generally believed that he called things by their 'right' name. Perhaps, the fall of the Babel monolith must have served as a great reminder that the mediation between man and God could not afford to trespass or ignore the almost infinite variation in the real world - linguistic, social-cultural, and even material - that seems to be forever unfolding itself. Eco apprises us later in the work of an alternative perspective that had come from an Islamic theologian, Ibn Hazm, for whom there was indeed an original language which included all others; in the Koran the *confusio* was regarded not as a curse, but as a natural event.

The question of what exactly is the right name for the right thing, was central to the linguistic speculations of the Socratic Greek tradition, as is evident in Plato's *Cratylus* fragment, where it appears as a debate between the 'naturalist' versus the 'conventionalist' views on the origin of language. Socrates' answer is that the origin of words must be attributed to an hypothetical, but non-divine first namer, who is a kind of artist, and who assigns the right pattern of sounds to the things, according to a natural principle of sound symbolism; and yet, since this proto-linguist could have well erred, it is required of all thinking humans that followed him to ensure that the world of things was known by their right names by dialectically/conventionally correcting any wrong correspondences that might have come to exist between words and things.

These linguistic speculations reveal a deeper metaphysical assumption that has guided European philosophical traditions for centuries: there exists a static, graspable domain of things, a 'real' world, ever waiting to be organized by means of right cognitive categories, and which can be once and for all correctly expressed by appropriate linguistic units and structures. Both the realist and the nominalist philosophies of language seldom considered what appears as the inherent flux of reality, which merely offers itself to cognitive and linguistic conventions, if at all, only as transient or *ad hoc* and random correspondences.

Except where the discussion is somewhat technical, Eco seeks to blur the distinctions between a perfect, a common, an artificial, an original, and an *a priori* language. This is perhaps understandable since the metaphysical tradition that he is talking of had always assumed a common social formation possessing a perfect representational system, both of which existed anterior to the pluralizing 'degeneration' that is characteristic of the later epochs. Though Eco doesn't dwell on it, what is more remarkable is that even modern philosophical enterprises continued to yearn for a reductive *a priori* language, through algebraic or other formulations, such as that of Leibniz, Boole, and more recently Fodor.

These linguistic speculations reveal a deeper metaphysical assumption that has guided European philosophical traditions for centuries: there exists a static, graspable domain of things, a 'real' world, ever waiting to be organized by means of right cognitive categories, and which can be once and for all correctly expressed by appropriate linguistic units and structures.

In the early middle ages, a parity between a real, divine world and language - in this case, the written language - was the basis of St. Augustine's assumption of a 'perfect language' common to all people. Augustine, in contradistinction to Fodor's 'language of thought,' had proposed a 'language of things', which Eco observes, derives from the idea that 'world was a vast book written with God's own finger. Those who knew how to read this book were able to understand the allegories hidden in the scriptures, where beneath references to simple earthly things (plants, stones, animals) symbolic meanings lay.' This had led to Augustine's interest in esoteric ideograms for according to him 'truth can only be expressed in emblems or symbols.'

Augustine's was only one of several attempts to arrive at an esoteric and God's own language which the divinely privileged could gain access to and which could reveal the hidden truths. The Jewish Kabbalistic tradition was perhaps the most prominent of these. However, the Kabbalists, instead of searching for a truth-functionally perfect language, believed in an infinitely proliferating combinatorics of alphabets, which did not just reflect God's creation, but was indeed the secret of creation itself. The principle applied or the belief involved, Eco notes, was that if God created the world by sounds or letters, the magical graphemic combinatorics that humans could concoct would in fact re-create the world. Kabbala was the God's secret language that the initiates among men could yearn to possess.

At the beginning of the European Renaissance, Dante Alighieri rejected the sacred and (hence) the 'universal' language, in favour of the popular ('vulgar') and the 'natural' languages. The newly emerging European vernaculars were claimed to be more 'noble' than Latin. For Dante, the vulgar languages, which children learned from their nurses before they were exposed to a classical, rule-based language like Latin, were more representative of the naturally-given human faculty for language, because it was through these that the humans could 'associate rational signifiers with the signifieds perceived by the senses.' Curiously, as Eco's commentary reveals, this emergence of European linguistics from the dark ages, and its relative secularization did not prevent further idiosyncratic attempts at constituting hidden and all-representing universal languages.

Readers may recall that certain principles of Raymond Lulle's *Ars Magna* had appeared previously in Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum.* A numerical combinatorics as the basis of a universal language made its first serious appearance in the *Ars.* The approach was possible thanks to the algebraic method borrowed from Arab scholars. Lulle's *Ars* was initially written in Arabic or Catalan, and was envisaged as a system of perfect language to convert the infidels. Eco informs us that it was meant to be an expression system, with rules and representations (presumably à la Chomsky), that can yield 'expression items which automatically reveal possible content-systems.' The latter, showing affinities to late medieval theology, consisted of a set of Absolute principles or Divine Dignities and that of Relative principles. An uneasy partnership between an Aristotelianized theology and Algebraic mathematics!

Following the gradual eclipse of Latin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was widespread search for a historical *a priori* language, linked with a monogenetic hypothesis of all languages. Hebrew returned as a major candidate in this regard, for Postel and Ducret, but for different reasons. Philosophers like Spinoza and Hobbes thought embodiment or human needs respectively as the reasons for monogenetic universals. For Rousseau on the other hand, 'the primitive language spoke by metaphors. This meant, in primitive language, words did not, and could not, express the essence of objects that they named.... Such a primitive language was less articulated, closer to song, than a properly verbal language.... It was language that represented without reasoning' (p. 107).

Giambatista Vico's historicist explanation of language, partly to counter Cartesian rationalism, is important: the sacred/divine first languages had to be hieroglyphic (e.g. Egyptian), while the second form of humanity's languages were heroic (Homeric Greek), and finally emerged the democratic third form of epistolatory languages (the European vernaculars). Vico's was a precursor to Condillac's historicist-sensualist theory of the origin of signs, in late eighteenth century, according to which the symbolic ('institutional') signs proceeded from a primitive language of action. It is not difficult to find some of these views echoed in the recent linguistic theories (that of Mark Johnson, in particular) that root themselves in embodiment or experience, with or without a historical perspective.

The dominant monogenesis view of the epoch was opposed by Destutt de Tracy and Degérando, the *idéologues*, in early nineteenth century. Their radical relativism suggested a progression from indexical signs, through mimicry, to figurative language involving metaphor, synecdoche, and metonymy. Since the 'indices' were ultimately and thoroughly local it was not possible for different nations to have the same cultural, linguistic, or moral values. Languages were not preconstituted,

but were the result of social collaboration. Hence, each society had its own national character, or genius, as Herder had put it. Or, for Wilhelm Humboldt, every language had its own *'innere sprachform'* - a sort of linguistic-conceptual deep structure - even if the underlying rational processes were the same for all humanity. More recently, the Sapir-Whorf position on linguistic and cognitive relativism and the Lakoff-Johnson notion of conceptual metaphors have played similar roles in rebutting the universalisms of our own times.

Eco's account helps us to discern a persistent desire in European scholarship for attributing sacredness to or for adopting the assumed superiority of other cultures and languages. At different moments of history this desire was directed towards Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, Sanskrit, and even Chinese and Hopi (the last in the case of Whorf). A quiet veneration for the originalness or the proximity-to-the-world-of-things of one or the other of these languages is a recurrent theme. But so is the theme of a more ideal and perfect language attainable through hermeneutic or rational reconstruction of one's own or better known languages. Heidegger, early Wittgenstein, and Chomsky may belong to this latter tendency.

In his Conclusion, Eco focuses on a practical issue: Europe needs a common language, or at least a new ideal of inter-translatability. He refers to Walter Benjamin's notion of a Pure Language which is a kind of totality of all the intentions of all languages, which no single language can access in their entirety, but which can coexist reciprocally and complementarily. Benjamin's pure language may be seen as a sort of vast pool of linguistic resources - in the form of experiences and reasons - from which varied linguistic expressions can derive their specific meanings and flavours. And that is close to what Eco himself earnestly and rather sensibly recommends: 'The solution for the future is more likely to be in a community of peoples with an increased ability to receive the spirit, to taste or savour the aroma of different dialects.... [E]ven those who never learn to speak another language fluently could still participate in its particular genius, catching a glimpse of the particular cultural universe that every individual expresses each time he or she speaks the language of his or her ancestors, and his or her own tradition' (pp. 350-1). This is indeed a policy that can help flourish the rhythms of particular languages, literatures and world-views.

FRANSON D. MANJALI is Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Pioneer's Perils

Udaya Narayana Singh

BṚHAT MAITHILĪ ŚABDAKOŚA, FASCICULE II
by Jayakanta Mishra
Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995; ii+220 pp., Rs. 200.

The work under consideration is truly gigantic, planning to cover about one lakh root words in Maithili in four sizeable volumes spreading over 1600 pages. Each volume has been called a fascicule - the first two of which have 420 pages in total. As the Preface in the earlier fascicule brought out by the Institute 22 years ago had stated, the original plan was to publish the lexicon in 11 volumes of 200 pages each. It was with this ambitious target that the work was begun in 1950-51 by the author, and the patience and perseverence of its creator testify that this project, which has so far taken 45 years of devoted work, can easily put it in the class of other large dictionaries of Indian languages - most of which are team efforts, funded and supported generously by various bodies. It is a fact that Mishra has been able to do this work with much less support - both financial and academic. Now that it is published and is in the hands of learned users (the stated aim being '... for the use of the Maithili scholars as well as the non-Maithili scholars'), many defects and discrepancies may come to light. But there is no doubt that the author deserves his share of commendation, and so does the Institute which encouraged this endeavour.

The dictionary was planned to be a comprehensive dictionary of the Maithili language, bordering on an encyclopaedia. It was meant to aid us in our study of ancient language and literature as well as to serve as a frame of reference which is both a corpus planning tool - standardizing its diverse spellings - and a compendium of all words that have appeared in one literary text or the other.

These aims can easily fan one's expectations from such an ambitious project. But from what have so far been brought out, it is clear that the lexicon cannot cover as many words as its creator may have liked it to do. The two fascicules, put together, have so far covered only 8,773 words beginning with vowels and 13 more starting with the letter *k-*, the first consonant in the Maithili (or, Tirahuta) writing system - thus taking, on an average, 4.404 lines per entry. Each page has about 46 lines in each column, and there are two columns per page. Even if the final product has 2200 pages, i.e. 2,02400 lines, the average entry size as above tells us that there can only be 45,958 entries and not 100,000. But now that the revised estimate (as stated on the printed jacket) stands as 1620 pages roughly, we would expect about 33,842 entries. Anyone who is well-aware of the lexical resources of Maithili and the subtlety of expression in its stock would admit that, for a comprehensive dictionary, this figure is on the lower side. My count of mere verb forms in Pt. Dinabandhu Jha's *Maithili-Maithili Lexicon* tells me that he had included 1,342 major verb forms, even though many such as conjunct verbs and verbal compounds were left out by him. Further, not all derivatives were included there which alone would have accounted for 20,000 verbs and derivatives. But as a pioneering work, thirty to forty thousand root entries may also be considered an important achievement, for *Bṛhat Maithilī Śabdakośa*.

I am, however, afraid that because of lack of rigour and systematicity (going by the best traditions of lexicography in many European languages), Mishra's lexicon includes a large number of entries of predictable morphemic alternants and declinables. Let us take some concrete examples: in comparison to other vocalic words such as *a*-words (4,689 words in two fascicules), *ā*-words (983) or *u*-words (1,628), entries beginning with vowels *o-* and *au-* are already very few - 354 and 114 respectively. But let us see how entry-slots are wasted here. Several declined forms of the infinitive *aū̃ṭaba* 'to stir milk on fire' (by the way wrongly described as 'the out of sterring milk over a fire', p. 416, entry no. 4482) are included as 3 to 4-line entries on the same page, which include *aū̃ṭa, aū̃ṭala, aū̃ṭāita* (once again printing error with *aū̃ṭāiia), aū̃ṭi* and *aū̃ṭaita.* One can understand why a nominal derivative *aū̃ṭana* has a separate slot. But there seems to be no logic behind the inclusion of other five conjugated forms. An alternant with *-l* infinitive was again placed separately. Compare this case with another verb with *au-*: *auāeba* 'to be perplexed' which has no declined or derived forms listed. But then *aū̃ghāeba* has four declined forms plus two derivatives. Another verb, *ōghadāeba* 'to lie down, roll on' has seven declined forms but the author has forgotten to include the infinitive form. The most superfluous set of entries has to do with *āeba* 'to come' which has 30 entries under *ā-*, including dialectal and spelling variants. Besides, there are a dozen other entries under *au* - which are mere alternants of different declined forms of the verb *āeba;* for instance, *auṭa (~āoṭa), autahi/-hu, autā(ha) (~aotāha), autī(hi)(~aotī)* or forms such as *aute, autaika, autainha,* etc. It is difficult to understand as to why there should be two separate entries for the feminine forms of *autāha,* the third person masc. hon. form - once as *autī(ha)* and again as *autī(hi).* One could use cross-referencing technique or list one of them as a variant under the other.

Quite a number of printing and proof-reading errors have also crept in. For example, in the entry on *'aū̃ghāyale'* (p. 416, entry 4470) the meaning is described as 'whild stillsleepy' and *'aū̃ghāela'* (*ibid.*) is wrongly transcribed as *aū̃ghāeba* (meaning listed as 'to be slightly sleepy's to doze'). Under *'ōghāḍa'* many forms are listed, but with different spelling variations (which are clearly not textual variants) for the same infinitive noted in the descriptions. In the entry on *'aūṭha'* (p. 416, entry 4490), there is no mention of its grammatical class membership. Wrong transcriptions are also numerous. Only a few samples would suffice here: *ātaporṇa* for *ātapoṣṇa* (p. 231), *asothakita* for *aśothakita* (p. 202), *āśrayā* for *āśraya* (p. 202 under *āśraye*), *conto* for *canto* (p. 203, under *aśvamedhikaparvva*) and *aśvavara* for *aśvavāra* (p. 203).

Considering all the errors in the volume, it appears to me that the work has not been strictly refereed or copy-edited. I would only hope that the two volumes which follow will avoid all these errors, and would leave a valuable treasure for both scholars and ordinary men who may wish to read and understand literary texts in Maithili. However, as I have already pointed out, if we exclude the duplications and repetitions, these four volumes will be able to cover only about 25,000 root words, and that will leave the task of preparing a reasonably exhaustive dictionary of Maithili to future researchers. Now that the number of scholars from Mithila specializing in linguistics is increasing, I do not think this challenge will be left unaccepted for long.

UDAYA NARAYANA SINGH teaches Linguistics at the University of Hyderabad.

Persuasive Communication

Arundhati Mukherjee

DIALOGUES OF REASONABLENESS
by Deepti Gangavane
Pune: Nimitta Prakashan, 1995, 140 pp; Rs. 200.

Dipti Gangavane's *Dialogues of Reasonableness* is a well-produced book that provides a reconsideration of the concept of rationality. Her attempt is to construct a theory of knowledge within a theory of persuasive competence which, in its turn, is based on theories of linguistic and communicative competence. Gangavane demands that the concept of rationality should be widened in such a way that it must include all types of non-formal reasonings within itself and that it should not be dominated by the ideal of deducibility. This gives rise to the distinction between rationality and reasonableness. She tries to assess the rationality of persuasion by using the standard of reasonableness. A wider notion of rationality, says Gangavane, includes reasonableness. The conditions of reasonable communication - such as fellow-feeling, will to make an appeal instead of using force, etc. - are said to be fulfilled in the persuasive mode of communication. Hence, it follows that to be reasonable is to have persuasive competence. She then claims that this dialogical model which includes reasonableness in her sense, offers a new approach to the concept of objectivity. Gangavane's book concludes with the anticipation of a new ontology.

In her first chapter, Gangavane traces the development of rhetoric from the classical age to the twentieth century, focusing on thinkers as varied as Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Burke, and Perelman. The discussion of their views provides a clear understanding of the history of rhetoric, although one may feel that the chapter would have been richer if Gangavane had also discussed the major criticisms of these positions. Gangavane tries to show that Perelman's view of rhetoric is different from the traditional conception. However, when she states that, according to Perelman, the audience plays a crucial role in the process of argumentation (persuasion), and that it is necessary for the speaker to have some kind of preliminary knowledge of the opinions of the audience, one wonders if argumentation does not become a 'conscious attempt' on the part of the speaker to persuade the audience? If this is the case, Perelman's speaker cannot be said to be significantly different from that in the traditional conception.

Gangavane's second chapter addresses the theory of persuasive competence. The word 'persuasion' is taken by her in a very wide sense, rendering the connotation of the word rather complex. Linguistic persuasive competence presupposes both linguistic competence of a Chomskyan kind and communicative competence of a Habermasian kind. However, both Chomsky's as well as Habermas's theories rely on certain universals, i.e. linguistic and pragmatic universals, and provide an explanation of language acquisition with the help of those universals. Although they start with performance and explain it in terms of an underlying competence, it is not clear how starting from culturally contingent features of language we can pass on to the culturally indifferent, universal, unchanging elements. According to Habermas, the ability to generate grammatical sentences in speech-acts, and also the ability to communicate, presuppose that all languages have a universal core or that native speakers have pragmatic universals or dialogue-constitutive universals. On the other hand, according to Chomsky, linguistic universals or universal knowledge denoted by the term 'linguistic competence' enables native speakers to generate an infinite number of grammatical sentences out of finite means. Gangavane rightly points out that since well-formedness of a sentence is the crucial element in Chomsky's framework and as it does not deal with intersubjective contexts, linguistic competence can be called monological. In contrast to Chomsky, Habermas's universals are intersubjective linguistic elements which enable the speaker, while producing a speech-act, to reproduce the general structures of a speech situation. It may be argued that neither the monological framework of Chomsky nor intersubjectiveness of Habermas's framework take us very far, on account of the ahistorical and essentialistic assumptions about language and communication that underlie them.

The third chapter in *Dialogues of Reasonableness* is entitled 'Rationality Reconsidered'. Here Gangavane tries to highlight the limitations of a restricted notion of rationality. Her argument opposes the identification of rationality with deducibility. Such identification implies that all knowledge systems should begin with self-evident axioms and derive valid conclusions from premises by strict logical operations and through the use of a set of already accepted rules. In a deductive argument, therefore, the conclusion follows necessarily from its premises. Deductive arguments, when correct, are called formally valid, whereas in an inductive argument the relation between the premises and the conclusion is not that of strong entailment. Gangavane rightly feels that we need to reconsider the notion of deducibility for a reappraisal of the concept of rationality in general. However, one cannot simply ignore the compelling nature of deductive reasoning - it has an objectivity, in the sense that the relationship of entailment that underlies it either holds or does not hold, irrespective of our knowledge of it. A deductive argument may be used to convince someone of the truth of the conclusion when he is already convinced of the truth of the premises. Or such an argument may be used to explain a fact - a conclusion following deductively from scientific laws and antecedent conditions. Thus deductive argument which has its own objecive character may be put to use either for persuasive purposes or for explanatory purposes. (See, for a similar distinction, Michael Dummett, 'The Justification of Deduction' in *Truth and Other Enigmas*.)

Gangavane contends that rationality can be extended beyond deducibility by including reasonableness. Reasonableness, she argues, although governed by the rules and regulations, is not bound; it is open, flexible and can change according to the needs of the situation. Here, the assent of the receiver can be called rational in the sense that it is neither arbitrary nor subjective; it is made with the good of others as its objective. However, one may suggest that the notion of reasonableness is relative. Certain receivers may consider that a particular situation should change with its rules and regulations for certain reasons, while some other receivers in the same situation may not feel this need for change. This raises crucial questions concerning the relations between reasonableness and power.

The way Gangavane develops the notion of reasonable persuasion in the fourth chapter - 'Reasonable Persuasion' - is fascinating. Briefly, her point is that reasonableness can be determined by referring to field-dependent criteria and rules. This can be called epistemological reasonableness in the sense in which persuasion can be called reasonable. This notion of reasonableness also has a moral aspect. It has a standard for examining the dimension of rationality of persuasion on the one hand and also for the moral dimension on the other. The author says that the essential mark of reasonableness, which makes it dialogical, is its concern for others. Reasonable persuasion presupposes and is directed towards an 'ideal concept of community based on the feelings of respect and fellowship for each other'. There should not be any coercion in a reasonable dialogue. It is true that the very possibility of human freedom depends on a restructuring of our so-called traditional idea of rationality to make room for a more historical idea of man as a reasonable being, which is the only guarantee of a more meaningful variety of freedom. But the concept of an ideal community (where each man has a deep concern for others) at which reasonable persuasion, as Gangavane has sketched, aims, becomes rather difficult to accept. For, if we accept the author's view of reasonableness, we will have to believe that reasonable dialogue between people in a community rules out the possibility of coercion, and brings in only fellow-feeling and respect between them. This is indeed far from the case in the real world. One may feel that this argument does not adequately address the question of power.

In her concluding chapter - 'Beyond the Frontiers' - Gangavane orients her argument in a new direction, where the possibility of a new ontology is indicated. I am in sympathy with what she says. The author has tried to highlight the conditions under which one may have ideal linguistic communication. The book would have been more rewarding, had the author pointed out where we really are and how we can strive for this ideal. I feel that we should not favour the idea of a system of universal rules underlying the diversity of uses. Our focus should be on actual words and actions rather than on atemporal formulas. The gap between truth and justification must not be seen as something to be bridged by a transcultural sort of rationality which can be used to criticize certain cultures and praise others.

ARUNDHATI MUKHERJEE is a Research Fellow of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research at Jadavpur University.

The Crisis in Film Studies
contd. from page 7

To examine such a proposition let us take the case of Rabindranath Tagore, one of the most important figures in the reformist-rationalist enterprise of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whose long shadow still extends over large groups of the intelligentsia.

The fact is that knowledge of Sanskrit and especially the *Upanishads* was central to Brahmoism from Raja Rammohun Roy to Pandit Shivnath Shastri to Tagore. What they did was to adapt Hinduism to the needs of the age by eliminating the encrustations of superstitious obstacles to progress without giving up their essential *Hindutva*. At a time of extreme decadence they used both persuasion and confrontation to make the country evade mass conversion to Christianity and to wake up to the rational side of the mind, reducing the power of unmediated tradition. Rammohun Roy was instrumental in having the institution of *sati* banned and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar in forcing society to accept widow remarriage. All of them combined to abolish polygamy. It is their positive acts which created an intellectual elite that forms the leadership of the opposition to Hindu national fascism today. Without their labours of the time the Indian left or New Left would not have come into being. And it is not as if their work is over; one look at the mighty infrastructure of superstition that survives in society, reinforced by the rise of religious fundamentalism, convinces one of the overwhelming need to reassert the mediating power of rational thought, and, in some respects, to reinvoke modernism.

Those like, say, Rabindranath Tagore, who did so were not thereby alienated from their tradition or from the myths that have provided spiritual support to large masses of people for thousands of years. Indeed much of Rabindranath's poetry or his songs are impossible to understand without identifying his deeply *vaishnav* roots and his basis in classical learning. Take the well-known Tagore song *kyano jamini na jetay jagalena nath / bela holo mari laajay*: 'Lord, why did you not wake me before the night was over / Now that it is day, I will die of shame'. If you did not have the Radha-Krishna myth in your bloodstream and instinctively invoked the nightly tryst of a young married woman with an adolescent both of whom are human and divine at the same time, if you had not in fact ceased to be conscious of that fact, it would be impossible for you to get the full emotive value of the words. Or, for that matter, the music wedded to it. Thousands of such examples can be given from Tagore's works. Indeed, in the entire Tagorean tradition there is no question of reading and learning about or self-consciously cultivating myth; it is in one's bloodstream, an integral part of one's consciousness, of even the dream world that lives within one. Myths do not remain thereby unchanged for ever; they naturally keep in step with every reorientation of the self to changing realities and to all desire for change. Tagore's literature is replete with this constant, dynamic, reinvention of the equation of tradition and change.

VI

Among other buzzwords that need re-examination are 'Brechtian alienation', the 'epic theatre' as opposed to 'illusionism' and 'Aristotelian catharsis'. Almost the entire Indian theatre and narrative tradition has been one of alienation for more than two thousand years. Our epics have stories within stories, our plays have *sutradharas* or presenters who break into the narrative; both serve to keep their audiences completely aware of the fact that they are watching a play or listening to a story and prevent them from surrendering themselves to an illusion of reality. This is also true of the folk theatre. Obviously the total influence of these forms in India for some three thousand years have been immensely greater than that of Brecht, whose theatre was a minority cult in Germany and had relatively wider impact only outside his own country, largely in English-speaking regions and mainly confined to *Galileo*. On the rising Nazism in Germany he had no impact of the effective scale his plays sought implicitly in their ideological projection.

It would be idle to assert that those who adopted the illusionism of the novel as a fictional form for modern India were not aware of the epic or the alienating features of Indian traditional theatre. They did what they did because they felt the new form would have a greater impact and in this, over a period of more than 150 years, they have been proved right. The Indian novel in a dozen languages has come to embody the quintessentially Indian experience of the entire modern period on a mind-boggling scale. Neither their illusionism nor the shades of Aristotelian catharsis in them have anything intrinsically invalid about them; more than anything else, the question of the novel has been, and remains, a question of the social and ethical value of a particular form at a given point of time. It is obvious that through the immersion of oneself in the experiences of the other, the audience comes closest to transcendence from self-love and is changed in however small a manner from what it was before the experience. The fact that it may not be 'intellectually' conscious of that fact makes little difference to its mutation through experience.

Free criticism represents a revolt against the tyranny of the academic labelling industry which has of late been working overtime. Very often the grand announcement of a new label means no more than old wine in new bottles.

VII

The problem on the other hand is that at the heart of India's film studies, there is no urge to redefine categories in the light of the country's own tradition and its modern experience. Indeed the capacity to do so is not even considered central to the issue. There has been a wholesale importation of premises, assumptions, categories and definitions from the west, which has a well organized, relatively free academic structure that readily rewards talent, allows the individual enough support and enough freedom to develop himself/herself. It is not surprising that some of the best minds from the Third World should rush to this intellectual haven and flee - physically or spiritually - the mindless roadblocks to creativity that Third World structures set up in order to inflict the power of the average on the talented. In one way or another, countries like India regard talent as an obstacle to the vested interests of the untalented and dub the pursuit of excellence as elitism. 'Vulgar Marxism' is still a powerful force and, along with rightist philistinism, lends muscle power to all forms of opposition to intellectual growth.

Nor is it surprising that the West's combination of freedom and discipline should give rise to systems of knowledge and a network of theoretical structures which represent the cutting edge of progress in understanding society and the arts, among other things. These understandably influence the *avant-garde* of Indian scholarship and impose themselves upon the disarray by which the Indian scholar is constantly surrounded.

This in turn prevents the growth of theoretical and speculative structures from within the Indian soil, firmly connected to Indian history, tradition, languages, literatures and arts, yet open to ideas from elsewhere which they can accept on merit by their own standards of judgement. The illusion of belonging to an international fraternity obscures the Indian scholar's awareness of the absence of firm indigenous foundations to his/her thinking. Many of the influential critics/scholars do not even have Indian language skills of a respectable order. All discourses and judgements tend to follow patterns emanating from the contemporary West and are mostly conducted in English. The need to study Panini's unique grammar or the narrative strategies of ancient Indian epics, works of fiction and theatre, murals, and bas reliefs, the edicts of Indian *shilpashastras* and to bring them to bear on the study of cinema through joint manoeuvres with other specializations and holistic studies along with them has not even been realized. Without this, Indian film studies will never have an independent foundation or acquire the capacity to fuse or reorder thought streams from all directions to give them a new universality.

CHIDANAND DAS GUPA, film-maker and film-critic, is Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.

Aesthetics of Anger
contd. from page 9

realism as just another signifying convention.

Oppositional Aesthetics includes two brilliant studies of M.G. Vassanji's African fiction. Mukherjee finds it especially poignant because it is written by a conscience unable to forget its ancestral guilt: for many Indians settled in East Africa not only collaborated against the indigenous population, they were also implicated in slave trade, kept black concubines, and fervently shared some Indian nationalists' dream of annexing East Africa and turning it into a second India. Mukherjee is alert to Vassanji's importance as a resurrector of some of the most disquieting ghosts from beneath the seemingly impressive track record of India's freedom struggle. And one is tantalized by Mukherjee's vision (I almost thought of Muriel Spark's *Sandy Stranger!*) from which nothing seems to escape. Even the otherwise very warm essay on *Uhuru Street* ends with a sharp complaint. The cover of the book uses three photographs, one of Mick Jagger, which is reproduced by permission, the other two of our film stars Om Prakash and Neetu Singh, for which permission was not considered necessary: 'why is it that Third World resources are for exploitation by the First Worlders, whereas their resources are strongly guarded by patents and copyright laws' p. 168)? No squeamishness this, if you pause to consider how far the issue spills.

There are a good number of Canada-based South Asian and African poets whose work is discussed in the book. Himani Bannerji, Krisantha Sri Bhaggiya-datta, Dianne Brand, Joy Kogawa, Claire Harris, Cyril Dabydeen, Rienzi Crusz, Lakshmi Gill, Reshard Gool, Arnold Itwaru, Surjeet Kalsey, Suniti Namjoshi, S. Padmanab, Uma Parameswaran and Asoka Weerasinghe - the list is impressive. It is a shame that barring a few, they are only names to us here. The lines she quotes from their poems suggest that they write oppositional poetry. They are all hyphenated Third-World-Canadians, and even when they do not speak to us quite as shrilly as they to the Canadians, we owe it to ourselves not to assume that Canadian literature written by the Third Worlders is important only because of an Ondaatje here and a Bharati Mukherjee there. All these writers belong to the same territory that Mukherjee occupies - and are part of the battle for their 'otherness', their cultural specificity, their shared historical memory. To them 1 July is less important for its being Canada Day than because the native Canadians mourn it as the day 'they stole our free land' and because the Chinese Canadians curse it for inaugurating racial immigration policies.

I read Mukherjee's book twice in the space of two days. First, I went on reading it because it read as well as any fast-pace novel. The second time I read it for absorbing its anger, for grasping its implications for me, in India, far away from Canada or its racial and sexual politics. There is perhaps some justification for concluding this review by stating what this book is likely to mean to someone like me.

What makes the book important, perhaps also controversial, to us here is not so much its single-minded, occasionally obsessive, pursuit of its anti-establishment agenda as its outright rejection of fellow-travellers whose paths might be different but whose goal is not. It is as if Mukherjee were determined first to see how far she could go and only then to see which ones of the white groups would be willing to catch up and meet her on her own terms. Some would catch up, of course, but some others may not. This stance imparts her book a feverish urgency, makes it impossible for the reader not to register it, but is haunted by a suspiciousness that might effectively deprive it of support from potentially useful partners. I sound somewhat false to myself - for I know how valid, for example, the attack on 'feminist' male writers or critics is; and I do see how incompatible the dominant paradigms can be to many a marginal section even when they are feminist or socialist. Still, the problem is real: one essentializes categories like sex, class and race - even while endorsing the position that woman, or for that matter a Dalit or a Third Worlder, is made, not born. The problem is as difficult as, say, changing one's skin, and there is everything to be said for the suspicion, even paranoia, in the victim. Only sometimes, reading Arun Mukherjee's arguments, one feels as if for her it is a case of everything or nothing, as if partial friends are no better than total enemies.

The second thing that made me uncomfortable was my own situation as a literature teacher lecturing to young students at an Indian campus. Like Mukherjee, I acutely distrust all universalist, metaphysical and formalist bombast, devote a whole lot of teaching time trying to persuade them to think of Caliban as one of us and of Prospero and Miranda as treacherous colonizers. Invariably, the students end up asking me to discuss the 'important topics', importance being measured in terms of the examination pattern. This pattern obviously privileges formal patterns and universal themes in *The Tempest* over what the play means to Africa or the Third World. A few students might prefer a more irreverent, a more purposive reading of the play, but since their scripts are evaluated by outside examiners, one is always tense wondering if the students' post-colonial answers would pass muster or not. An oppositional teacher is seldom comfortable, for if he is taken seriously by students, he might unwittingly ruin their careers.

Another thing the book thrust upon my attention relates to translation. Arun Mukherjee is in favour of translations of Third-World texts not only provided they do not violate the slightest cultural codes but also provided they are heavily footnoted, italicized and annotated. She is rightly piqued at a *chhoti chachi* being rendered as 'little auntie' or *paan ki beghum* as 'the queen of the beetle'. Considering that footnotes and italics and even substantial glossaries are hated very much by publishers (and also by readers if they are not strangers to the codes and terms in the original) even in the Third World, it is perhaps time that a comprehensive dictionary of culturally significant peculiarities, phrases, words, and idioms was compiled in India. Such a reference work should be of considerable value both to readers and translators wherever they might be located.

Finally, an unhyphenated reader that I am, I cannot help feeling that except where the texts themselves (positively as Uma Parameswaran's or Vassanji's; negatively as Ondaatje's) steady her, Arun Mukherjee is tempted to treat all Third-World writers as if they would be 'naturally' hostile to universalist or formalist aesthetics. As a matter of fact, while our history probably pushes our writers away from such an aesthetics, there is enough in our ancient traditions to privilege and promote it. So that sometimes it appears that some of our talented writers are hell-bent upon 'denying' all those 'inferior' forms of time and being that are contaminated by history and politics. This has no direct implication for Mukherjee's argument, but it leads me to wonder if as an overarching category the Third World justifies leaving out of consideration categories like class and caste. To put it differently, while one might grant that Ondaatje is a black sheep among the Third-World writers in Canada, how does one account for his being (or becoming) that? Nearly everything that happened to Ondaatje happenned to Mukherjee as well. How was it that he was co-opted, patronized, promoted, while Mukherjee's brilliant 1988 book was denied even a publication grant? Is it all due to possible differences in 'individual talents' or are some other, larger logics involved? As it is, while Mukherjee is most unambiguous in her judgement on Ondaatje, her analysis of his writing does not quite explain the socio-political phenomenon which he represents. This is where one feels that the discussion would have been richer and more edifying if there was not such a rigorous exclusion of class as a crucial factor in canonization.

Still, the problem is real: one essentializes categories like sex, class and race - even while endorsing the position that woman, or for that matter a dalit or a Third Worlder, is made, not born. The problem is as difficult as, say, changing one's skin, and there is everything to be said for the suspicion, even paranoia, in the victim. Only sometimes, reading Arun Mukherjee's arguments, one feels as if for her it is a case of everything or nothing, as if partial friends are no better than total enemies.

JAIDEV is Professor of English Literature at the Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.