

Book Reviews

Aesthetics of Literary Classification, by Milind Malshe, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2003, ISBN-81-7154-859-8, pp.178, Rs.150.

That literary classification has an epistemic, aesthetic and taxonomical basis, that distinctions between genres is a running controversy within literary and cultural studies, is the 'contract' that the book under discussion establishes between the readers and the writer. Professor Milind Malshe has been a protagonist of a very unconventional aesthetic theory of genre distinction in terms of 'contracts', a metaphysically deep notion of understanding 'deep structures' of a genre of art. Part of Malshe's novel theory of aesthetics emanates from Hindusthani classical *nritya* and *tarana* as art forms and genres that combine the configurational, representational and the mimetic aspects of aesthetics meaning in a non-linguistic mode of performance and hence breaks with the fixed traits of a genre. Applied to Western canons of aesthetic developed by Aristotle, Kant and a host of other literary theorist such as New Critics and post-Structuralists, the essentially representational aspects of a genre looks like a denial of categories, kinds and names that has evolved in the so-called Western aesthetic theories. Malshe discusses a host of such Western theories in both the fields of aesthetics and literature to

demonstrate that the criterion for distinction of genres by them produce a deeper *antinomy* between the experience of the aesthetic and the literary 'object' in a genre and the rule or the contract that 'classifies' it to a genre. Malshe, therefore, contends that the terms of debate in determining 'genres' are 'essentially contested', but 'they need not give rise to 'antinomies', which cannot be rationally resolved' (p.144). Ways of resolving such antinomies and paradoxes lie, according to Malshe, 'in the form of life and the language games of a given cultural tradition' (*Ibid.*). The question is, can we adopt a *Culturalist* position without getting entangled into the antinomies and the paradoxes that it throws us into? Shouldn't we rather adopt a third person point of view in understanding the limits of a culture bound theory of genre?

The concern about antinomy between object and the law of genre originates from Kant's anxiety about antinomies of reason. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant in a sense overcomes such antinomies, when he credits the transcendental power of imagination in creating representations of possibilities of experience, which 'schematized without concepts' and which are *also* affects of cultural objects that are present before the senses. Subjective judgment about such affects, which are non-representational, non-

conceptual and sensual, does not issue from the faculty of reason, but from a desire for the beautiful that resides in the very process of constituting a 'pure form' divested of the world of representations. Malshe goes a step further in separating aesthetic experiences from cognitive mechanisms by granting it 'autonomy' as an experience of alterity, which is an existential possibility. This strategy is paid off in a rich way when he undertakes critique of central problems within critical traditions. Particularly the idea of life as 'uncircumscribed spirit' in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition as enunciated by Virginia Woolf is commended by the author as it lies uncaptured in the images, metaphors, plots that are used to organize a text belonging to lyric, narrative or drama as a genre. This further points to the possibility of an aesthetic rendering of life without making it subservient to verbal texture of the literary text, a strategy of granting autonomy to both the text and its affectation. Such an autonomy of the text establishes the larger possibility of having a contract between the author and the reader/audience that modifies the meaning of the text to the extent that it makes possible 'reversal of values', which is an existential affect of a genre upon an audience or a community of readers, who themselves constitute the new meanings given to an

aesthetic experience. This, of course, is what goes against the dogma of the New Critics, that is, the supremacy of the text. As Malshe shifts the centre of gravity of aesthetic understanding from text to its reception in terms of responses from readers, he opens up the closures of modernist literary theories to an intersubjectively arrived meaning. In a true sense, as Malshe commends, Heideggerian critique of art-as-thing, especially Heidegger's discomfort with thing as already constituted within a horizon and suggests an alternative of creating things in art as disclosure, as 'wound of existence' (pp. 74-77).

Two limits are conflated here: limits of culture and limits of a critical tradition. The fundamental distinctions between lyric and ordinary as employed within high modern European culture with all its attendant revolutionizing functions, for Malshe, are determined by 'traditions' of culture. It is in this functional mode, concepts and distinctions utilized by literary theories, perform a cultural role. This simultaneously gives life to a prevalent aesthetic and literary theory and performs what it constructs/ deconstructs within a culture. Therefore, Malshe formulates that aesthetic and literary theories cannot be asked to deconstruct what it performs within the culture by exercising a 'reading against the grain'. If it tries to do so, it turns out to be self-contradictory as Post-structuralists like Derrida lands up in. Malshe argues that Derrida's interpretation of the statement; 'I will not mix genres' institutes the law of contamination within the law of purity. What the law of genre, 'I will not mix genres' performs by *not* allowing mixing genres is under-

mined by the law itself that does not participate in or belong to any genre. In other words, neither any specific un-mixed and individuated genre instantiates the law nor genres that are not to be mixed by law as an imperative signify the act of not-mixing genres. Rather the act of 'not-mixing' as a performative meaning gets postponed and hence individuation of genre remains an impossibility. What Malshe argues is that this deconstruction of what the law performs is subject to the same process of deconstruction leading to the reverse moment. If the law of genre gets undermined by genre itself, the reverse moment is that the same norm of undermining applies to the very act of under-mining. Malshe argues that if Derrida aims to deconstruct the closure of all texts, then how does one understand the very meaning of 'closure', 'deconstruct' or terms like, 'because', 'therefore' etc.? If indeterminacy of meaning is applied to these terms, how does one succeed in carrying out deconstruction of what deconstruction performs? Malshe, therefore, is very cautious in suggesting a 'reading against the grain' exercise as it logically stultifies itself. This situation with modernist aesthetic and literary theory poses a challenging problem of naturalizing aesthetics/literature, which the book promises to do.

Malshe ambitiously defines 'naturalization' as a 'process of assimilating a text within cultural system or modes of order'. In a sense this is a simultaneous identification of the limits posed on a text by a culture as well as a demarcation of 'boundary' of the text. He brings in Eliot's notion of engagement with texts that are prior to an author as well as Jonathon Culler's notion of

an in-built intertextuality of discursive practices offer a systematic explanation of the complex relation between culture and text that determines even the conceptual and generic character of a text. That classification into genre brings in a necessary theoretical grounding of a text and brings description of literary and aesthetic phenomena under it. It also involves the possibility of transcendence of the 'thematic' of the text, as meaning of a text is mediated by a correspondence between past and present, formal and material, noumenal and phenomenal etc. These possibilities lead us to what Malshe called, 'basic categories of literature' or contracts, which are underlying bonds that link author with the reader and one text with another (p. 106). The most important question in identifying such contracts is a methodological point that Malshe raises about the relatedness of literary contracts with the non-literary ones, which is another way of re-inscribing the relationship between literature and culture in the field of aesthetic reception. In doing so, Malshe places emphasis on the possibility of implied author/reader relation, which is part of a holistic understanding of the relationship between literature and culture. He identifies modes of contract in the form of functions like emoting, showing, telling, all of which identify their 'objective correlative' as a pragmatic necessity. Malshe also employs Wittgensteinian notion of 'form of life' to describe how literary texts communicate their meanings, which not only happens within an already given form of life, but ensures a creative autonomy for form of life in which it happens. By preserving an idea of context for

literary expressions, Malshe alludes to the fact that literary texts share their fictionality with non-literary propositional content that they embody. This is how the fictionality or literariness is brought under some kind of propositional content to narrow down its meaning, but at the same time such an operation of governing fictionality under the thematic widens the scope of understanding how the text is related to human life that exists in complex forms. It is such a relationship between text and life that establishes intertextuality and a kind of 'family resemblance' between language games that texts individually partake in.

Malshe demonstrates how this project of naturalization explains better the fictional and metaphoric character of literary narratives without compromising the possibility of arriving at a reasonable contract between the text and the world. Supposedly this demonstration is directed against the post-structuralists, who conceive the text as inherently metonymic yielding only to an interpretive abyss. Contrastingly, Malshe takes up a reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* to show that an ideological and aesthetic decentring of literary meanings base themselves upon a radically new vision about existence and experience that calls for a 'reformulation of the relationship between art and human life' (p.143). This is to counter the thesis that post-structuralists advance, that is, literary language as play only gives rise to an aesthetic of absurd or the negativity that ends up in dissecting the endless oppositions in the text. For Malshe, anti-novels like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Joyce's *Ulysses*; anti-plays like

Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of a Character* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* defies rules of genre only to grapple with the complex, fuzzy and intertextual character of human life. In doing so, they employ all kinds of literary and philosophical techniques like 'syntactic inversion', 'foregrounding of absence of meaning', 'fuzzing of boundaries' etc. all of which mark a specific purpose and use. Without taking such purposes into account, anyone would fail to understand construction of a particular meaning in a particular text, which again is organically related to life itself. In other words, Malshe denies the thesis that life does not exist outside text or representation, rather preserves a meaning of life in terms of creativity, which is a continuous flow from life to text and text to life mediated by cultural and aesthetic norms and practices. Literary and aesthetic practices like 'stream of consciousness' method as employed by Virginia Woolf or a breakdown of the fit between the word and the world employed as a technique to communicate absurdity of life by Beckett, are nothing but a manifestation of the basic literary contracts. But just as a contractualist fails to develop a ground, which is culturally neutral, which is not always already contaminated by existing discursive practices, Malshe too, falls in the same hermeneutic circle in his holism of 'contracts', which follows from concrete practices. As a logical notion, basic literary contract as an underlying principle of classification of genres is a surrogate of an already existing hermeneutic linkage between reality and representation and hence presupposes what it attempts to explain. What Malshe does is to widen the circle with his

claim that aesthetic and literary reproductions of life are enhanced by techniques that critics, authors, and readers value as useful and therefore classification into genres follows a pre-existing cultural scheme.

What is instructive to note in contemporary discussions of aesthetics is that how one avoids the hermeneutic circle of life-literature connection by proposing an 'explanation of the inexplicable' as Kafka does in explaining the myth of Prometheus in four legends.¹ Kafka's presentation of legend follows a pattern: first, Prometheus betrays the secrets of gods to men; second, he gets one with the rock because of unbearable pain inflicted on him; third, he forgets himself and in the fourth place, gods grow weary of Prometheus' act as he becomes one with the rock. This is how the actors of the legend end the legend marking the failure to explain the inexplicable by the legend. The current state of literary and cultural theories mark a Prometheusean end after growing weary of what they cannot explain. By offering a theory of basic contracts Malshe is trying to salvage literary theories from a deracinating end, but in the process his own explanation sounds like a Kafkian 'explanation of the inexplicable' that goes through increasing virtualness introduced in contemporary aesthetics. This calls for a principle of 'deterritorialization' of aesthetics in Deleuze's sense², that is, by a practice of constant 'opening up' to a difference of interpretation, which is difference without concept.

However, Malshe's attempts of stitching together the entire corpus of modern and postmodern literary and aesthetic theories provide a feast

of ideas that often arrange itself to a central theme of 'meaning' of aesthetic and literary experience. This provides a grasp for critical thinking and incisive analysis. With his two decades of teaching of Aesthetics, Malshe is able to generate a considerable hybridity that crisscrosses theories with texts and puts them in a lucid juxtaposition. His commitment to British analytic philosophy, of course, gives him a not so fashionable and yet a rigour that makes the book stand out.

NOTES

1. Frantz Kafka, "Prometheus" in *Parables and Paradoxes*, translated by Wilma and Edwin Muir, New York: Schocken, 1970: 83.
2. Giles Deleuze concept of 'deterritorialization' means an endless dissemination of signs on the surface of the text that is transferred onto the very process of production of signs. See, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (1972), Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1983: 292-3.

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Vikram Seth: *An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, edited by G.J.V Prasad, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2004, pp.185, Rs 400.

By any standard, Vikram Seth is a striking literary phenomenon of our time. He has made impressive running in both fiction and non-fiction, as well as in poetry. Yet he has not made critical impact on par with his peers. The volume under review in the form of twelve papers on Seth's varied range of works fills a long-felt gap. These well-written essays—all freshly commissioned

contributions except two reprints—focus on *From Heaven Lake* (1983), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993), and *An Equal Music* (1999). The comprehensive assemblage of explorations aims at opening, as the blurb announces, 'various windows into Seth's world to enhance the reader's understanding and appreciation of this highly talented and most accessible writer'. How does the book deliver on the promise? Moderately well, I would say.

Allaying Seth's fears, as it were, Hugo Brunner, the publisher of *From Heaven Lake*, rang up the author the day before its official publication: 'Don't jump into the Thames if there is a bad review or no review at all.' Much to the surprise of the publisher and the author, the book was well-received and was also awarded the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. Seth's perceptive and delightful account of his travel experience from North China—across Tibet and the Himalayas over to Nepal and India—is discussed by Nandini Chandra in her paper 'A Different Gaze: Vikram Seth's Journey through Mainland China'. Unlike Paul Theroux in his *Down the Yangtze*, published in the same year as *From Heaven Lake*, Seth does not wax magisterial in his observations. He is more nuanced and less judgmental, without any 'overt ethnographic mission', as Nandini notes. Also unlike Rahul Sankrityayan, the Marxist traveller from India in the first half of the 20th century, Seth does not dwell on 'the legendary and historical mystique of Tibet'. In spite of the freedom deficit in the Maoist dispensation, Seth sees reassuring evidence of efficiency and professionalism in Chinese society,

and hence his gaze is different from the available perspectives on the mystical orient.

Although Seth is drawn to the 'warm humanity of common people' in the account of his hitchhiking adventure—not that he is not unaffected by ideological imprint on people in their quotidian transactions—his motivations are different from those that we see in Amitav Ghosh's travel accounts of Egypt, Myanmar and Cambodia with a rich diet of historical detail. Seth seeks to recover the real China from beneath the veil of ideology, but his itinerary follows a liberal trajectory in cutting contrast with Ghosh's committed mission. In a vein different from Naipaul's in his early travel accounts of India, Seth's slant is not dismissive of either Chinese cultural heritage or its ongoing, de-ideologised economic boom. Seth highlights the people, as well as pans across the landscape, without any colonial fixation or postcolonial position. However, cursory references to the Hindi writer, Rahul Sankrityayan as well as to Amitav Ghosh and Naipaul in Nandini's frame of reference needed further exploration.

Four papers in this anthology are devoted to Seth's poetry. While GJV Prasad and KC Boral evaluate Seth's poetic craft and thematic preoccupations in *The Humble Administrator's Garden* and *All You Who Sleep Tonight* respectively, Tabish Khair and Angelie Multani look at *The Golden Gate* with disparate points of view. Both Prasad and Baral give full marks to Seth for his technical accomplishment. Prasad provides explicatory snapshots of many poems from the anthology to underline Seth's formal control and compression of details as well as his

quiet irony and humour. He shows how Seth excels in delicious enunciation of loneliness, dry-eyed rhyming banter and is capable of making aphoristic statements leavened with wit. In the same vein, Baral demonstrates Seth's controlled elegance and seasoned craftsmanship evident from the poems in *All You who Sleep Tonight*. Design or formal finish is a salient feature of Seth's art. Even in a short lyric he can articulate delightfully- worded cognition of life's complexities and contradictions—a rare feat in Indian English poetry.

On the other hand, Tabish, a poet and novelist as well as a professional academic, raises the problem of narrating non-anglophone Indians in English. According to him, Seth's success in *The Golden Gate* is based on 'avoiding the problems of formulating a prosodic identity in Indian poetry in English'. In other words, Seth's *tour de force* has not created critical space for the reading of Indian English poetry on the accentual and prosodic terms germane to Indian English. Seth has received flak for keeping this novel in verse set in California 'thankfully free' of Indian connection and he makes no bones about it being Indian. But Tabish's argument does not stand up too well in the face of Seth's adroit versification in *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991). The poet does harness several accessories of speech to capture and authenticate the stuff of Indian experience, and his unusual resourcefulness proclaims his mastery of the medium. I would have thought Tabish would examine the issue of 'the fissured nature of the language', or the 'grapholectal' handicaps of the medium in Indian English poetry with reference to

Seth's compelling poetry anchored in Indian realities, or the occasional verse in *A Suitable Boy* that flavours with the novel for that matter. Besides, Tabish withholds his appreciation for Seth's clean representation of experience as well as his considerable talent for recharging a conventional form of expression such as the sonnet with new possibilities by eschewing, what reviewers say of Janet's creations, 'The languid tedium of lines . . . the artist's dated chains'.

The companion piece on *The Golden Gate* by Angelie Multani, however, deals with an assortment of love stories in a metropolitan setting. The depiction of consumerist, sterile and emotionally desiccated life in the sonnet-sequence from the vantage point of authorial standards extends beyond the immediate scenic backcloth. Angelie argues that even as Seth draws upon the Californian mores and milieu, his reaffirmation of stable family life with steady ties across the range of relationships in modern metropolitan society is amenable to cross-cultural implications. The verse narrative hallmarks the operative concerns in Seth canon.

As befits its massive size and range, Seth's magnum opus, *A Suitable Boy*, has claimed largest space in the form of four essays written with considerable theoretical sophistication. Neelam Srivastava and Priya Kumar engage with Seth's affirmation of secularism in the novel, but they press the point along divergent lines: Neelam reads the novel as 'a Nehruvian narrative of Indian state and society', whereas Priya problematizes Seth's endorsement of Nehruvian secularism for its 'paternalistic assumptions' and makes a plea for an alternative conception

of the identity of religious and ethnic minorities to contain the resurgence of religious exclusivism and the dangers of current cultural regression in a secular nation-state like India. However, both Neelam and Priya consider *A Suitable Boy* as Seth's intervention in 'the Indian political situation of the 1990s' (Srivastava 87), or 'the politics of Hindu nationalism in the 80s and 90s in India' (Kumar 138) by way of a historical novel.

In the microcosmic fictional setting of the novel in the imaginary town of Brahmpur representing the heart of India with institutional underpinnings like the State Legislative Assembly as a representative space for various communities, languages and points of view, and in the use of English subsuming regional inflections as well as the use of free indirect speech whereby the authorial voice takes a rationalist, secular position on the contentious issues of the nation, Seth replicates Nehru's liberal, tolerant and pluralistic outlook. On the other hand, in the private sphere attachment to one's religion, exemplified by Mrs Mahesh Kapoor's piety, is affirmed, and her husband's intransigent secularist orthodoxy or interventionist anti-religiosity is derided. Neelam suggests that while Nehruvian secularism has allowed many obscurantist religious practices to continue in the garb of culture or refined and restrained religious commitments, it has nevertheless held the country together. Inevitably, Seth reinstates Nehruvian ideals as an antidote to the inter-faith flashpoints in contemporary India. Finally, Neelam argues that *A Suitable Boy* 'presents a return to strong state secularism' which is referentially not equivalent to any establishmentarian

imposition, or establishment of irreligion.

In Priya's opinion, it is not only state or political secularism that Seth reiterates but also ethical secularism, and there lies the rub. She borrows the terms 'political secularism' and 'ethical secularism' from Rajeev Bhargava's essay 'Giving Secularism its Due' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, June 9, 1994:1784-1791) to differentiate state/ constitutional secularism from an ethics of tolerance. The latter, in Priya's sense of the term, based on the notion of majority-minority syndrome, militates against substantive equity and makes secularism unsustainable in a modern nation-state. However, Priya sidesteps the mutually-interlocking actions in which a minority too precipitates its marginalization by inventing imaginary grievances and mounting unreasonable backlash. The need of the hour is not only to rethink about the place of religious and ethnic minorities, as Priya argues, but to dissolve the majority-minority syndrome. It is possible only when, as Bhargava notes ('India's Majority-Minority Syndrome', *Open Democracy*, 7 August 2002), Hindus really value ideas of equal citizenship and Muslims adopt positive attitude to liberal and democratic institutions, shunning conservative communitarianism. To invoke Bhargava again, Seth's novel, besides insisting on interventionist secularisation, endorses 'the pluralist version of ethical secularism which is both secular and communitarian' (Bhargava 1790). Thus Priya's critical investment in Bhargava's term does not put any gloss on the notion of tolerance in the secularist discourse.

There is not much point in Priya's argument either that 'Muslim characters are figured largely along

standard archetypes' in the novel and that it has 'modern secularist Muslim sensibility' missing. People like the Nawab of Baitar, his sons, and the singer Saeeda Bai as well as Rasheed, are all very sympathetically portrayed. Some characters lose their sharpness along the axis of the urban-rural divide, not along the axis of Hindu-Muslim binary. If a modern and secular Islamic sensibility is not very markedly present in the novel, it is simply because such a sensibility did not exist in the post-Partition India, or perhaps does not exist even now. Seth is realistic in showing the limits to secular disposition in the Indian Muslim community in a story attached to its temporal co-ordinates; however, he does depict secular longings and liberal outlook at least in a handful of characters—and Rasheed stands out among them. In his Islamic take on secularism he questions the visibly monochrome, ossified image of Islam and brings religiosity closer to modern, rational outlook. There is palpable prejudice against change in the larger part of the community buttressing the misperception of Islam as a hostile monolith and adversary of the heritage of enlightenment and reformation. Rasheed bestirs himself, envisages legitimate dimensions of human progress and despises narrow religiosity, and so he flies in the face of conventional Islamic mores and is tossed away by the regnant Islamic orthodoxy. It is a part of the novel's secularism that Kabir and his family are identified as Muslim but without the conventional Islamic markers.

In an altogether different take on the complex filigree of themes in Seth's novel, Jon Mee invokes Johannes Fabian's scientific, secular idea of time in anthropological discourse and Dipesh Chakrabarty's

accounts of the problematics of postcolonial historiography in his book *Provincializing Europe*. Mee argues that *A Suitable Boy*, as a historical novel, is part of a universalized transition narrative even as the author sets out to show India as a robust postcolonial nation on the cusp of tradition and modernity. In contrast with Harish Trivedi's reading of the novel, Mee notes that the discourse of Indian modernity in the novel concedes the priority of a master narrative scripted in Europe. Mee's argument is quite cogent, but not credible enough. Modernity in India is rather entrenched, and it does not belong to a single tradition. Nor is it heading in any single direction, privileging a European narrative of development. Mee is wary of an allegorical reading of the novel and points out that Seth keeps colonialism and modernism apart. However, Mee flattens out the panoply of sub-themes to drive his conclusion. Seth's harsh satire on Arun Mehra's excessive Anglophilia is intertwined with the narrator's negative depiction of Meenakshi and Kakoli's fascination for Western liberation and modernity. Thus it is difficult to agree with Mee's view that the narrative of modernity in *A Suitable Boy* derives from a single source. In fact, it exemplifies de-centred polyvalency; in other words, it is open-ended and variegated. As Amartya Sen has noted, '[G]iven the long and tangled roots of recent intellectual developments, and given the mixture of origins in the genesis of the ideas and the methods that are typically taken to characterize modernism' (*The New Republic*, April 1, 1996: 32), modernity is not a well-defined, unproblematically acceptable concept.

Also, Mee misses to see the representation of Urdu in the novel,

except as 'nostalgia for a feudal world of Urdu literature and courtly entertainments' (Mee 119). Seth has the Nawab Sahib of Baitar express genuine concern about Urdu: 'Next week he (LN Agarwal) will try to force his Hindi bill through the Legislative Assembly, and Urdu, my language, the language of Mast, the language of most of the Muslims of this province, will be made more useless than ever' (ASB 998).

The mediation of historical material with reference to the depiction of rural space in *A Suitable Boy* vis-à-vis that in Phanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Anchal* (The Soiled Border), a Hindi novel published in 1954, has been examined by Angela Eyre. A common narrative strand between the two novels is the Zamindari Abolition Bill. While the intended beneficiaries of the bill are articulate and eminently visible in Renu's novel, those in Seth's novel are too weak and isolated. However, both novels narrate the failure of the land reform measure—*Maila Anchal* with a wealth of details and *A Suitable Boy* with the pathetic plight of the destitute serf, Kaccheru. The difference in the representation of peasantry, as Angela rightly says, proceeds from the difference in the narrative form of the two novels. The capacious frame of *A Suitable Boy* cuts a large swathe of India in an encompassing formation which substantially outweighs the thinness of rural representation, unlike *Maila Anchal's* focused regional locale.

Seth's next novel, *An Equal Music*, in a complete departure from *A Suitable Boy*, is basically set in London, except when it goes to Vienna and Venice, and this matter of location piques Mala Pandurang. She problematizes Seth's cosmo-

politan transnationalism in the absence of 'a humanist worldliness'. As the cultural map of the world remains divided between the metropolis and the margin, 'personal core of cosmopolitanism is not enough'. But, as Seth said to Jay Currie and Michele Denis in an interview (June 1999 online, np), the situation in *An Equal Music* did not warrant any laying of his ethnicity on it. Besides Mala's cogent critique, Meenakshi Bharat views this novel through the lens of ecocriticism, while Anjana Sharma is chary of approving Seth's phallogocentric choice of the fictive patterning with denial of agency to women. Anjana forgets Seth's fictional credo wherein Julia's decision to stick with her husband and son is in line with Lata's choice for Haresh in *A Suitable Boy* and Liz Dorati's for Phil Weiss in *The Golden Gate*. When it comes to choosing family for Seth, no feminist breaking out, or no concession to romantic passion for that matter.

Finally, a few words about the book's production. I lack the space to list the typos; suffice it to say that they are many and will need to be weeded out in the next print. The bibliography is not up to date. At any rate, I think it is severely incomplete. It is not precise either. For instance: it is not mentioned which paper in Meenakshi Mukherjee's book, *The Perishable Empire*, discusses Seth's work. Besides, there is no index to refer the reader to pages in the text. But it is churlish to cavil about these omissions. They are less obvious and must be seen against the real virtues of the book.

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The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North West Frontier, by Mukulika Banerjee, Oxford University Press, James Curry; Santa Fe: SAR Press and Delhi, 2000.

This is a study of the work of the Khudai Khidmatgar (servants of God, from now on wards KK) led by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan known popularly as frontier Gandhi and Badshah Khan. 'Most of the Khudai Khidmatgars had not had many previous opportunities to tell their stories of struggle and heroism' (p.7). In this remarkable study combining the insights of ethnography, oral history and critical cultural studies, the author talks to 'surviving Pathan member of the KK in order to discuss what it was that made ordinary Pathans adopt non-violence' (p.4). Under the charismatic leadership of Badshah Khan, the Pathans of North West Frontier province (NWFP) adopted the path of non-violence in solving their own problems as well as fighting against the British. Badshah Khan devoted himself to education, social reforms and sanitation improvement of his fellow Pathans. Badshah Khan led the life of a *faqir* spending more than 'twenty-years fervently trekking in the villages of settled districts' (p.77). Banerjee presents us an intimate portrait of the life and work of Badshah Khan as well as the Khudai Khidmatgar movement. Her explanation of this 'profound social creativity' (p.16) is carried out in the context of the Orientalist view of the Pathans as violent, and dangerous held not only by the British but also by some of the nationalist leaders of India.

KK or Servants of God was launched in November 1929 and it built upon the earlier two decades

of work in social reform of Badshah Khan Land his followers. Soon it formed alliance with Congress and was particularly influenced by Gandhi. 'Like Congress in the rest of India, the KK distributed spinning wheels and instructed villagers in the technique of spinning thread . . .' (p.78). The movement gave rise to varieties of creative experiments among people and poetry used to be read in its meetings. One veteran tells of Badshah Khan: ' . . . When he used to visit he was never a burden on anyone. He was like a faqir, he carried his own food with him and he ate only dry bread . . . people who went with him had to carry their own food too-usually a little gur and channa (sugar and chick peas)' (p.126).

Badshah Khan and the KK were influenced by Gandhi in following the path of non-violence but Banerjee quite creatively shows how this chosen path was interpreted to emerge from both Islam as well as the local culture of Pukhtunwali. For Badshah Khan, before Gandhi, prophet Mohammed also had adopted the path of non-violence. In her concluding chapter, Banerjee links this chosen path of non-violence to the Pathan tradition of self-restraint: 'In respect of non-violence, where Gandhi drew on traditions of androgyny, Badshah Khan drew instead on traditions of self-restraint. While Islam condoned revenge, it valued forgiveness more highly and within *Pukhtunwali*, while it was creditable to seek revenge, a man even gained more honour by showing restraint and responsibility, particularly in the context of an enemy who requested sanctuary...the strength of will which Gandhi attributes to the feminine principle in Indian cosmology is similarly

present as a virtue of ideal Pathan manhood' (p.212).

Banerjee discusses with care and empathy, the tumultuous history of Pathans and Indian nationalist politics. The KK allied with the Congress and was in fact part of the ruling coalition in the NWFP before the partition. But the British decided, unlike other such similar situations, that this province would go through a referendum to decide whether people would like to join India or Pakistan. But Badshah Khan and KK opposed this and they felt let down by the Congress. They also wanted the third option of an independent Pakhtunistan which was rejected by both the British and the Congress. The KK boycotted the referendum as a consequence of which its result went in favour of Pakistan. Banerjee's empathetic interpretation of this deserves our careful attention. 'In their determination to avoid clashes with their political rivals and their steadfast adherence to the principles of non-violence and service, they played a key role in ensuring that the course of events in the frontier did not decline from an intense political drama into an out and out bloodbath. To that extent they, forever, remain proud of a great and good moral victory' (p.191).

In her chapter, 'The Work of Memory', Banerjee tells us how in their discussion with her the veterans of KK rework the memory of their struggle. 'In discussing the movement's aims they emphasize not an unpartitioned India and autonomous Pukhtunistan, each of which would imply failure, but rather that of expelling the British which was certainly successful. They also stress their moral education under Badshah Khan—their cultivation of

an ethic of non violence, humility and service as a great achievement on its own right' (p.203). In the concluding pages, Banerjee engages herself with an interesting dialogue with Weber based on the life and work of Gandhi, Badshah Khan and KK. Banerjee argues how Weber's formulation of the relationship between politics and ethics needs to be rethought. For Weber, 'The proactive, pragmatic ethic of the politician embraces violence' (p. 203). In the concluding pages, Banerjee engages herself with an interesting dialogue with Weber based on the life and work of Gandhi, Badshah Khan and KK. Banerjee argues how Weber's formulation of the relationship between politics and ethics needs to be rethought. For Weber, 'the proactive, pragmatic ethic of the politician embraces violence' (p.203). But both Gandhi and Badshah Khan adopted the path of non-violence. Yet the adoption of non-violence never became the ethic of submission which Weber thought inevitable. This largely reflected the fact that like Weber, Gandhi and Badshah Khan realized the importance of ensuring that every activist had a high degree of 'truthfulness', or integrity and self-awareness (p.214). As Banerjee argues, contra-Weber, 'the Khudai Khidmatgars' struggle was directed not only outwards to the enemy, but also inwards, to free themselves from 'ethically base' motivations such as pride and envy. Far from being an 'ethic of indignity', non-violence thus gave its practitioners unprecedented pride in themselves and their actions, a pride which still remains fifty years after the event" (p. 214).

Banerjee discusses the work of this

outstanding social creativity that took place in the frontier. Building on the seminal work of Indian anthropologist and social theorist JPS Uberoi, Banerjee argues how frontier is a place of social creativity and civilizational dialogue. It is in this frontier that one of the great social experiments in anti-colonial struggle, non-violent resistance and social reform emerged which has a great global significance now as we face a growing xenophobia, an ascendant banality of patriotism and valorization of war and violence. We all are grateful to the author for helping us to learn from this remarkable movement.

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The Drupka Mystique: Bhutan in 21st Century, by Jaiwanti Dimri, Authorpress, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 188, Rs. 450.

In the ever-growing corpus of women's literature in English, travel writing by women as a genre holds but a small segment as it is relatively a newcomer in the field. Probably, it is due to woman's restricted mobility so far, or may be because she rarely could travel alone and enjoy the ambiance of a place on her own terms. Things have changed since and women traveling alone on job-assignments in particular are recording their impressions that give travel writing a new dynamism. It is exactly at this point that Jaiwanti Dimri's *The Drupka Mystique* enters the scene and leaves the reader captivated by her compelling style. A Professor in the Department of English, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, Jaiwanti Dimri has

had the unique opportunity to visit Bhutan on a teaching assignment and the book under review owes its origin to the rich experience she garnered during her sojourn there. Strictly speaking, *The Drupka Mystique* is not a travel book, nor is it a historical or literary document. It is, to put it a little poetically, 'a product of the labour of love'. The author chooses to call it 'vignettes' born out of her observations of and interactions with the people of Bhutan, but I would like to change it to 'loving vignettes' precisely because the pictures throb with life as the author pours her affection for the land into it. She has made commendable efforts to understand Bhutan in all her beauty, mystery and mystique and yet keep her authorial distance to notice her weaknesses not as a nation but as a developing society.

Befittingly, Jaiwanti Dimri introduces the land and the people in Part I of her book—its geographical situation, the rugged mountainous terrain, the proximity to nature, the spiritual wealth and the political history of Bhutan. The problem is that very few of us really know the country beyond bare facts. Dimri's book provides a vast panorama of the way of life of the people, which is influenced by Buddhist philosophy and proximity to nature. Jaiwanti Dimri's depiction is all-inclusive and she takes care to give as much information as possible within the limited space of her introductory chapter. By the time we flip through the pages to go to Part II, we are quite familiar with the country: its history, culture, religion, geography, flora and fauna, folklore and dances, in fact, all that one would like to know. For example, in a vague and general way we all are aware that Rivalsar in

Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh is the birthplace of Guru Padmasambhava, but it is fascinating to realize that the original name of the lake was Dhanakosha Lake and that the Mahaguru Padmasambhava was born in a lotus on its holy waters. The peculiarity of the writer is that she does not linger unnecessarily and glides with ease from one information to another without being fragmentary. The first chapter is informative and it also provides a base for the journey further.

Part II is both informative and interactive. It paints a rich picture of the socio-cultural life of the people, their literature, their folkways and the impact of the modern culture on these people who are basically attached to their religion and culture, and love to be unassuming and simple. Chapter 2 makes an interesting reading as it tells about the significance of *chortens*, flags and *manis* that are spread across the hills. 'Here, there, everywhere—on the hilltop, at the crossroads, by the roadside, near a Dzong, a Lhang or a monastery, in the towns and the forests, there would be a chorten and a mani and the prayer flag,' says the writer (p. 61). The concept of *chorten* is connected with Lord Buddha; it is a sacred relic. The prayer flags are associated with Sab Dag Ba Dhan. To put up a flag is auspicious but superstition has it that it is to be erected on specific days lest it brings ill omen. After the ritualistic description of religion, Dimri talks of religion from philosophical angle, in the next chapter.

A lively and interesting chapter, 'Drupka Dances and Songs' deals with the folk practices of the Drupkas. There are three types of songs—Szhungdra, Boedra and Rigsair—sung during the mask

dances. Thematically these songs are natural expressions of love and hate, joys and sorrows of existence and they point towards harmonious co-existence of man and nature. Thus is the ecological wisdom enshrined unobtrusively in the way of life! The accounts of the dances and other folk practices are interspersed with stories and anecdotes; that saves the description from becoming monotonous. One of the stories is associated with the 'Thro-Cham', it means the 'Furious Dance'; it is performed to subdue the evil spirit.

The tone of the author becomes jovial when she comes to the linguistic nuances and good-humoredly narrates the stories of people fumbling with Hindi and English and creating funny situations. She recounts the incidence of the 'cow's son' in tongue-in-the-cheek manner. Bhutan may be slow to accept change but the impact of globalization cannot be warded off. At every step Dimri encounters change and she feels confused because while change means progress, it also means annihilation of the traditional culture. The need is to keep the beauty of the culture intact despite transformations. Yet, the saving grace is that Bhutan is not very eager to accept outside cultural hegemony. It likes to retain its own ethos. That is one reason why the tiny country still remains a mystery.

Being a litterateur, it is natural that Jaiwanti should shift her attention to Bhutanese literature. Bhutan has its own traditional literature steeped in myth, legends and folklore but it is slow on creating new literatures. Talking specifically of indigenous literature in English, Dimri remarks with sympathetic understanding, 'Creation of literature and that too in a foreign

language for an underdeveloped country could verily be not one of the priorities at the initial stage of development' (p.121). Some translation and compilation work is being undertaken in the earnest at the behest of the Royal Government.

To add to the author's wide-eyed wonderment at the land so unique in many ways, she had had a chance to go round the country for an Orientation Programme; that broadened her purview. She aptly calls it 'circumambulating'—a word with hallowed connotations.

The last chapter entitled 'The Drupka Mystique' expounds the mystery of the land of the peaceful Dragon. It is 'a semantic construct which encapsulates the mood and the spirit, the air and the atmosphere of Druk Yuel in general and the Drupkas in particular'. These six pages are revelatory in which she catches the mysteriousness and the aura of the land. The book ends with 'Karding-chela' means 'Thank You'. With a glossary, end notes and a select bibliography, the work becomes a pleasant amalgam of scholarly exercise and a socio-cultural document exuding the joyous abandon of travel writing.

Professor Dimri, in bringing out the book, has not only captured her experiences but has also done great service to all those who wish to know more about Bhutan beyond 'tourist pamphlets'. I remember, we knew the word Druk in the 1970s-1980s only in connection with the tasty fruit jams and fruit juices coming from Bhutan. I acknowledge now that Druk, Drupka and Druk yuel mean much more.

The book is well brought out, has an attractive cover and good quality printing. Inside, it has got some useful and eye-catching sketches. But

I wish Dimri could have also provided a small pronunciation key to some typical Bhutanese words, for example, one does not know how the Bhutanese would pronounce Chorten or in Dzongkha whether 'D' is silent or 'Z'. One typographical error pertaining to the spellings of circumambulation/circumambulating is too glaring to be ignored. The language is effective, poetic at times, befitting the theme.

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Crisis in Higher Education: Role Analysis of Teachers in a University System, by Rani Mehta, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2004, ISBN: 81-7835-305-9, pp. 386, Rs. 790.

In recent years, tremendous changes have come about in education. This is particularly so with the advent of the WTO regime in higher education. These changes influenced both, the techniques as well as the methodologies of imparting education, thereby affecting the very purpose and objectives of higher education.

The technological revolution taking place in higher education with e-learning is revolutionizing education at all levels. E-learning is to provide all that is required for a realistic interaction in the learning processes. E-learning is not going to dispense or make classrooms redundant, but to make teaching more effective, based upon realistic considerations of the learner. E-learning uses all the modern information technologies not only to make learning effective but also exhaustive and relevant as the end product.

In changing global economies,

universities must cope up with emerging challenges, choose the fast developing technologies and make the best use of new opportunities available. There arises a renewed challenge to adapt new approaches to teaching, create new and dynamic curriculum in order to maintain universities as centres of higher education. Universities have to redefine themselves in order to meet the diverse new roles it has to play as centres of social transformation, nation building, scientific advancement and development of human resources.

We are now operating, on the one hand, in the era of information society or knowledge society and on the other, in a globalized economy. In such a situation, every nation needs competent manpower for accelerating the pace of development. But in the context of our society, the crises of higher education gets pronounced due to lack of funds, faulty examination and evaluation methods, politicization and bureaucratization of the university system, stress on liberal arts rather than on vocational courses, skewed distribution of teachers to students, lack of autonomy to teachers, etc. In the wake of these issues, there is an urgent need to recognize the pattern of higher education with a view to evolve a system in which teachers can play effective roles.

Teachers are key actors in the university system. They are expected to rise above their self-interest and show a concern for the common good of the students and build up their personality structure for their effective role in society. It is well recognized fact that teachers do operate within the university prescribed system but it is also

important to analyze their performance in terms of how they relate these to the set of expectations from the students and administrators. In the book entitled *Crisis in Higher Education: Role Analysis of Teachers in a University System*, Rani Mehta studies these significant aspects of higher education. The book is the result of doctoral research work conducted at Panjab University, Chandigarh.

After an introduction, in which the author has delineated the research problem of her study, provides the reader with a historical account of the growth of education in India, review of studies, objectives and the theoretical framework, hypotheses of the study, the methods of data collection, plan of analysis of data and limitations of the study. In the second chapter of the book the author gives details regarding demographic, socio-cultural and economic profile of the respondents. In the third chapter, the author analyzes the 'role socialization' and views of teachers towards the profession. The fourth chapter highlights the 'role perception' and 'expectation of teachers'. The fifth chapter deals with 'role performance of teachers'. Teachers' views on crisis in higher education have been discussed in the sixth chapter. The outlook of students towards higher education, role of teachers and student-teacher relationship find expression in the seventh chapter. And in the concluding chapter, the author discusses the 'Crisis in higher education' in relation to 'role challenges to teachers'. The book has also four indices on Family Social Status Index of Teachers, Academic Level Index of Teachers; Participation Level Index of the Teachers in the University/Colleges Bodies

and Associations and Firmly Social Status Index of Students.

The study has thrown up some interesting findings. Most of the teachers, for example, prefer instrumental roles such as teaching and research over expressive roles, such as cordial relationships with colleagues and communication with colleagues and students. The study also shows that there is a gap between self-estimate of teacher's performance and perception of students towards their performance. According to perception of students, the performance of teachers falls short of their expectations and leaves something to be desired. The teachers by and large, lack attributes such as clarity of thought and expression, sensitivity towards the needs and hardships of students, sincerity of purpose and above all dedication and commitment.

This study which is based on three systematic samples, i.e., of teachers, students and educational supervisors in selected teaching departments and affiliated colleges of the Panjab University, Chandigarh, while making a comparative analysis between university and college teachers found that teachers in the university encounter more of professional problems while those in the colleges have to encounter more of organizational problems due to bureaucratic imperatives and the politics of management.

The study, further, brings out clearly that irrespective of gender, status and academic achievements of teachers, they seem to recognize that higher education is in crisis. The three most important factors ranked by the teachers pertaining to such a crisis are: (a) increasing politicization and bureaucratization of higher education, (b) the tendency on the

part of teachers to give precedence to their self-interest over the academic welfare of the students, and (c) faulty examination and evaluation process. Most significantly of these three, the politicization and bureaucratization of the university system impinges adversely the recruitment process of teachers and demoralizes and (de)motivates the teachers.

The study makes a definite contribution in creating a conceptual framework for analyzing the role of teachers in a university system. The socio-political structure as an external system, an organizational milieu as an internal system, certain attributes of teachers influencing their perceptions and motivations and expectations of their supervisors and students are the three key elements that need to be analyzed for delineating the role of teachers in a university system. The inclusion of students' perspective in delineating the role performance of teachers is a significant addition to the study. The author has aptly concluded that in order to strengthen the role of teacher, the roles of various players (the administrator, the teacher and the student) in the university system need to be well-defined and oriented towards one another in such a manner so as to bring in greater correspondence between role expectation and performance.

The author deserves appreciation for carrying out a comprehensive empirical study in the field of sociology of education. No doubt, the book is a welcome addition to the literature already available on educational sociology in the post WTO and e-learning scenario wherein the role of teachers in higher education is under serious scrutiny.

The book contains 386 pages

which could have been reduced by proper editing of the original project report. This would have resulted in a more sleek volume and pleasant to read both by scholars and general public. Needless to say, that the study is of immense use to educational planners, administrators and students of sociology, psychology, education and anthropology.

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Writers: Photographs by Nancy Crampton, The Quantuck Lane Press, New York, 2005, ISBN: 1-59372-019-X, pp. 224, \$ 40.

Writers: Photographs by Nancy Crampton is a book of photographs of literary personalities—novelists, poets and playwrights—with a difference. Along with the finely reproduced duotone portraits of these litterateurs, who have shaped the literary scene of not only America but of the entire world, are few lines from the pen of these personalities about their thoughts, important moments and their perception of what good writing is.

In some abstract way the 'portrait' of a writer is always present in his writing itself. Even then a pictorial representation of a writer adds 'flesh and blood' to the portrait. For this reason it is a normal practice in the publishing world to give the photograph of the author on the blurb of a book. It helps the readers to get an insight into the mind of the author by seeing him through the visual medium and then analyzing his writing. This must have been the idea of Crampton in reproducing the photographs of these litterateurs along with a few lines from their pens.

However, the possibility of a 'tension' between a pictorial representation and the personality traits emerging from the writing cannot be altogether dismissed. The charm of the book is that the photographs of the writers are in complete harmony with their writings. On the one hand is the persona of these litterateurs from the eyes of an ace photographer, on the other are their ideas and perceptions, providing a unique combination and balance, which is the novelty of the book.

Crampton is a photographer of repute and has lived up to the expectation. She is the official photographer of the Unterberg Poetry Centre, New York, which is famous for its literary readings. She has specialized in capturing literary personalities in her lenses, a job she is doing for three decades now. The book contains photographs and 'self-portrayal' of 104 literary personalities, who have influenced the American literary scenario. These include all time greats like Bellow, Mailer, Cheever, Wolfe, Singer et.al. The photographs of these literary personalities which have been taken over a period of time are technically of very high standard. Each portrait has something different to say, reflecting the various facets of these litterateurs, which include ten Nobel laureates. As has been mentioned by Crampton herself, she has taken photographs of different authors at different places and in different moods. Yet there is an underlining commonness in all these photographs—it is the perfect timing of capturing these personalities in the camera and the finesse of the duotone portraits.

VS Naipaul and Jhumpa Lahiri are the Indian 'connections' of the book. Crampton has caught Naipaul in a

relaxed mood whereas Lahiri appears engrossed in deep thinking. In his brief autobiographical sketch, Naipaul has described what it meant to be a 'failure' and how it helped him to get his 'own voice' which got reflected in the form of his writings. This is complimented by his photograph, in which he appears to be calm, his eyes reflecting the contentedness of a successful author. Lahiri on the other hand walks into the lanes of nostalgia, highlighting the influence of Calcutta in her writings. She candidly accepts that even after spending several years in America, she has not been able to come out of her Indian mindset, which is reflected in her novels. The predicament of the young author, something which can be termed as

'identity crisis', can be very aptly gauged from her photograph.

The book has undoubtedly been brought out very well. It is flawless, the printing is of very high standard and the materials used are excellent. The photographs have been reproduced perfectly, thereby doing justice to the photographer and the book.

Although the book is excellent in every way, it appears as if it has been brought out for those who are in the know about the American literary scenario and are well versed with the works of the litterateurs, who find a place in it. Had the book been brought out only for the specialists, the approach would have been justifiable. But as it appears to me, no publisher who is bringing out the

book on such a grand scale, can have a limited audience in view. It would have been better if a few lines of biographical sketches of these litterateurs along with their important works would have been mentioned. It would have increased the value of the book.

However, on the whole this book is a fruitful attempt to portray the authors through their visuals on the one hand, and their side of the story on the other. It will be a valuable addition to the collections of all those who are interested in the contemporary literary scenario.

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Indian Knowledge Systems, edited by Kapil Kapoor and Avadhesh Kumar Singh
2 Vols., 2005, xi, ix, 710p; Index; 25 cm.

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