

Book Reviews

Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, London and New York: Allen Lane-Penguin, 2009. pp. xxviii+468, hb. UK £ 25.

In this *magnum opus*, Sen moves beyond 'justice as fairness' paradigm of Rawlsian contractulism. Rawlsian contract treats every member of a liberal polity as equally advantaged or disadvantaged in formulating a principle of justice. Rawls' notion of formal right to justice as a rational choice of an individual on the basis of certain consensual primary goods, according to Sen, does not address the relational aspect of justice. Sen highlights this relational aspect of justice over the rational: relational aspect is embedded in an agent's sensitivity to consequences to everyone else, while rational aspect is supposedly agent-neutral. He distinguishes the two by asking two kinds of questions; rational questions presuppose a third person view such as asking, "What is it like to be a bat?", while relational questions place the human being at the centre by asking, "What is it like to be human?" (p.414) Sen attempts to find a different answer from other liberal-contractarians by delineating the very necessity of talking about justice,

In arguing that the pursuit of a theory of justice has something to do with the kind of creatures we human beings are, it is not at all my contention that debates between theories of justice can be plausibly settled by going back to features of human nature, rather to note the fact that a number of different theories of justice share some common presumptions about what it is like to be a human being. We could have been creatures incapable of sympathy, unmoved by pain and humiliation of others, uncaring of freedom, -unable to reason, argue, disagree and concur. The strong presence of these features in human lives does not tell us a great deal about which particular theory of justice should be chosen, but it does indicate that the general pursuit of justice might be hard to eradicate in human society, even though we can go about the pursuit in different ways. (pp.414-15)

Sen is highlighting the fragile and fallible state of human nature that afflict judgments of right and wrong and making a plea for adopting a pluralist stance towards

the idea of justice in order to make it relevant to the human condition. Liberal-contractarians reduce the inner resources of human nature and its problems to a matter of rational choice that makes public use of reason to offer justifications for choices. Such justifications are often based on an idea of just and right that guide social choices. Sen is unhappy about implications of social ordering of choices as it merely calculates the preconceived just outcome without taking into account how diverse agents interact, decide and actually behave. The interactive and constantly evolving games of strategy making between agents in order to settle for the just and the good arise always in relation to other such strategies and not merely by pre-calculating the best rational outcome for the agent. From the agent's own position, what seems to be subjectively adequate must converge either with other similarly placed agent's preferences or in response to such preferences. Such a positioning of the agent in relation to other agents provides the clue to individual's liberty and its necessity in a social and cultural environment that largely seeks freedom of action and weighs consequences of such freedoms. In the sphere of justice, an individual's determination of the sense of this freedom is closely connected with an idea of good and justice. The question is, how does freedom of action ensure just and good outcomes?

Sen theorizes on this possibility of justice on the dual bases of 'equal basic liberties' for all and counterposes it to 'inequalities' that can be used to garner the greatest benefit to the disadvantaged. On the positive side of it, basic liberties for Sen would amount to 'functionings' such as income and poverty alleviation that would ultimately expand the freedom of choice. Inequalities there act as a stand-in for evaluating the capacities to promote certain kind of functionings that implicitly assumes certain kinds of social arrangements. For a proper theory of justice Sen emphasizes on that kind of an evolved rationality that allows for linking up one's priorities, methods and visions about progress to a

redeemable and similarly placed global context. Sen emphasizes global justice that emerges as a mantra for overcoming positional limitations of a proposed theory of justice that ignores the whole world for serving the purpose of 'justice in one country'. What economic and political theories of justice should aim at is to first free itself from all forms of closure in terms of position and situation in order to break through a narrow concept of neighbour as the settled community(ies) and establish 'relations with distant peoples' (p.172). Sen proposes a two level understanding of a praxis of justice: at the first level an agent's cognitive framework of choice within a discursive matrix of distribution of rights and entitlement determines his concerns of justice while at the next level a transpositional perspective takes over that can neutralize the closed bounds of a framework of justice. Such a perspective does not ensure a transcendental solution to injustices and unfair practices that methodologically boils down to a 'view from nowhere'. Such a view from nowhere produces 'closed impartiality' based on an underlying ethical or cultural code. The style of thinking 'justice' in terms of abstractions that is fairly closed and disconnected from other such competing or complementary ideas turn out to be exclusionary and it denies the possibility of responding to or follow 'different types of reasoning' (p.178).

Narrowing of Mainstream Economics

This brings Sen to the point of exorcising some of the skeletons from the cupboard of justice. The very idea of rationality as used in Rational Choice Theory (RCT), for Sen leads to a paradoxical 'prisoner's dilemma' that merely indicates the standstill of options between actors. The brand name RCT within mainstream economics merely results into maximizing individual well-being in which hypothesizing about the position of the other is always considered as the basis for goals of maximization. RCT within the so called Welfare Economics assumes a terrifying proportion of normative restriction on the free choice of the agent as stated in Pareto's condition of optimality. The impossibility of a Paretian liberal seeking an optimal level of distribution through balancing of demands and supply in an imperfect world, according to Sen, undercuts the diversity of choices into a straitjacketed interpretation that narrowly establishes equilibrium. Speaking in the same vein, Sen discarded various strategies of playing an informational game, as any choice of strategy between participants of a game does not guarantee acceptable outcomes. Within mainstream economics, Sen does not see any possibility of resolving the problem of choice except by way of taking

an ethical turn towards justice.

This turn towards justice called for Sen's renewal of a mix between ethics and economics, which weighs foundational principles behind economic decisions and their outcomes. Such foundational principles constitute a significant body of writings. Sen engages the readers of his *magnum opus* in a dialogue with thinkers of the very First principles of economics. Much more than exorcising them in the light of the problem at hand, Sen expropriates their ideas in the annals of justice. A few examples may suffice to show how Sen invokes a key economic philosopher such as Adam Smith in order to examine how inequality and injustice is sustained in the reasoning of the 'impartial observer', who sets up a fixed set of goals through institutional mechanisms. The so called impartial observer calculating each one's entitlements and dividends from institutional processes does not provide sufficient reasons to make others reasonably accept someone's needs and demands. Sen rather problematizes the notion of an impartial observer by pointing out procedural parochialism involved in the so called impartiality that tend to reject various other ways of achieving justice as non-impartial. If 'Impossibility Theorem' leads us to a social ranking of goodies in consonance with fully revealed social preferences, then why is it that there always is a 'tragedy of commons'? Sen advocates 'plurality of impartial reasons' that results into mutual reciprocity between actors seeking a just distribution of goodies, which involves a sensitivity to consequences as well as to agents who have to evaluate the ground reality in terms of assessing justice.

The exclusionary neglect of agent independent concerns within theories of just distribution of income and resources, for Sen displays a kind of rationality that is not reflexive enough to see its own follies. What Sen called as transpositional justice arises here: the basic human rights and liberties are universal, and independent of the context in which justice is construed in an agent-relative manner. But universalizable tenets of basic human rights and liberties are still institutionally imperfect, yet such imperfect obligations are necessary in allowing human rights to stand. Transpositional notion of justice not only surpasses the narrow concept of utility, but it also overcomes the illusion of bearing values and interests in 'real' life of the agents. This illusion of justice being seen to be done in a positioned state of existence becomes meaningful if it could withstand public scrutiny. Judgments about justice must accommodate various kinds of scrutiny based on a variety of reasoning. Sen called it as 'non-parochialism as a requirement of justice', which is, an openness towards plurality of reasons that

are outside the 'captivating hold of entrenched traditions and customs'. (p.404) Sen further characterized it as the virtue of 'open impartiality' that does not exclude possibilities against its determined outcomes. Open impartiality can synchronize the interests of a focused group with that of 'rights as freedoms'. Such a synchrony leads to freedom from fear as well as to formation of values. The question that we can ask here is, to what extent does open impartiality set the stage for justice in economic decisions?

Sen gives an answer to this question by delineating a broad view of freedom, one that encompasses both processes and opportunities and allows for recognition of 'the heterogeneity of distinct components of freedom'. Freedom is both constitutive of social and cultural choice and it is also instrumental to interconnected range of social and economic opportunities, political liberties and normative safeguards. This leads Sen to provide for interpretative freedoms to economic phenomenon in terms of public reasoning that takes into account heterogeneous components of freedom such as link between human security and political power, democracy and development. This is also an attempt to provide for an evaluative criterion for mainstream economics that involves an inclusionary incoherence. In Sen's parlance political rights, including freedom of expression and discussion, are not only pivotal in inducing social responses to economic needs, they are also central to the conceptualization of economic needs themselves. Such a heterogeneous mix of components of freedom is a state of inclusionary incoherence that needs to be neutralized by an open impartiality. In Sen's words,

There is no embarrassment in accommodating several distinct features within the idea of freedom, focusing respectively on capability, lack of dependence and lack of interference. (. . .) A theory of justice can pay attention to each. (p.309)

If a theory of justice pays attention to this, it results into a description of plausible economic and social rights that reduce 'capability inequality', which needs not be seen only as agency-freedom, but also needs to be seen as well-being freedom. Such freedoms only can connect agency with well-being. This is exemplified in comparisons of freedoms and capabilities unfolding a multi-stage theory of justice.

Injustice Re-examined

Beyond the paring of equality/inequality, justice/injustice as contraries, Sen in his multi-stage theory of justice examines the import of injustice in terms of its experiential circumstances. Sen's paradigmatic statement:

'In this little world in which children have their existence there is nothing so finely perceived and finely felt as injustice.'(p. vii) This experiential domain of injustice compels us to think of reducing it as far as possible. This reduction is possible by working through responsibility that assumes asymmetries of institutional and power relations. Such asymmetries are useful in making better placed peoples more responsible towards those who are lesser mortals. This approach stands in contrast to application of reason in institutional arrangements for distribution and harps on 'comparison of justice for choosing among feasible alternatives'. (p.9) This comparative approach to justice is a point of departure from what Sen called 'transcendental institutionalism' that draws an idea of justice only on the basis of 'just society' or an ideal and perfect arrangement of institutions. Such a comparative approach can be based on 'social realizations' (based on actual behaviour of people and realization of justice). Sen bases his argument about choosing among feasible alternatives on actual situations of poverty, distribution of income and resources and perception of what is unjust, unfair and unequal. Injustice for Sen lay in destruction and diminution of capabilities of human beings involved in a struggle for existence which cannot in any way be compensated by entitlements. Injustice becomes the cornerstone for a theory of reasonableness that may determine the play between Rawlsian veil of ignorance and demands for justice. This demand for justice grows within our engagement with perspectives on justice in a well-ordered society, where the role of basic institutions of society lies in establishing a social world, within which alone, we develop 'care, nurture and education (. . .) and into free and equal citizens.'¹ Just as Rawls established the ontological ground of justice into an institutional framework of 'social good' in the same way Sen also advocated equanimity of liberatarian theory of justice that combines evaluative aspects of justice with its well-defined institutional framework. Cases of injustice arise by way of malfunctioning of the institutional framework, which interestingly enough, can self-reflexively see those cases and correct itself. This is where equanimity of liberatarian choice would play its role.

Injustice is a by-product of reasoned alteration between neutral and partial ordering of choices at the societal level that develops out of asymptotic behaviour of individual agents. Such asymptotic behaviour arises not out of institutional settings but it arises out of aggregation as well as segregation of individual's choices over different choice sets. The question that Sen addresses is, can choice

sets be operationalized with a consensual contract between supposed libertarian forms of reasoning and action within a well-ordered society? The question is raised in the context of reorienting the notion of 'capability' and 'individual functionings' into reasonableness of the demand for being just to the deprived and the marginalized. This is also a simultaneous assertion of a positioned subjectivity of the marginalized within the mainframe process of choosing and deciding, which is Sen's mainstay in the book.

The situation is exemplified by a supposed value conflict between distributive justice and recognition.² Similarly between liberal-contractarians and communitarians, the conflict of values arise centering the role that cultural specificity plays in assigning 'values' to development. They cannot resolve between themselves should the 'values' of justice be specific to culture or they should be trans-cultural. The developmentalist stance to eliminate cultural differences on the anvil of a common goal of 'just' material progress and prosperity complicates the debate between communitarians and liberal-contractarians. The thesis shall attempt to sort out the debate on the basis of an idea of 'good' based on the idea of 'justice' or rather on the basis of eliminating injustices that arise in the overall impact of a programme of development.

In its overall thrust, Sen's attempt to pluralize the debate between libertarians and contractualists in terms of equally possible solutions to questions of injustice is a novel attempt to move beyond the liberal paradigm of constrained freedom of choice. He privileges 'freedom of choice' both in theory and practice to evolve an alternative of parallel reasoning and resolving the problem of injustice. The book is extremely readable, well argued, meticulous and detailed in analytical as well as in phenomenological terms. Sen's inspirational attempt to such panoply of thoughtful and pleasurable essays is itself a striking achievement. Anyone interested in economics or philosophy should read this book for a defensible account of justice.

NOTES

1. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 43.
2. In his book, *The Idea of Justice* Sen has exemplified the divergent views of justice with the example of three children and a flute: Anna, Bob and Carla fight over a flute. Anna claims that she should get the flute that is lying on the ground because she knows how to play it, Bob says he should get it because he is poor and has no toys of his own, and Carla says she should get the flute because she made it. Theorists of diverging

schools of justice would have different views, Sen writes: 'The economic democratic who is committed to reducing social gaps might feel that Bob should get the flute because he is poor; the libertarian would say that Carla should get the flute because she has made it; while the utilitarian hedonist may feel that Anne's pleasure would be greatest because she can play the flute.' (p.3)

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Bhalchandra Nemade, *Nativism (Desivad)*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2009. pp. 179. Rs. 360

Bhalchandra Nemade's 'nativism' concept and his reflections are already, for the last almost twenty years, a part of literary thinking in the departments of languages in the Universities and a widely discussed issue in Marathi intellectual circles and also in some other states such as Gujarat where the 'native' stream still runs strong. But what was earlier available in dispersed essays, and translations of some of them, and by word of mouth has now been put together as four coherent lectures with an appendix that puts some of his thoughts into critical/evaluative action.

It is a rich text bustling with ideas, rather a text with ideas jostling with each other – a clear evidence of Nemade having so much to say in a defined temporal space and anxious that he may miss out on something. It is a statement of the current vicissitude of a complex, variegated, long-lived, and in many respects a unique culture, the Vedic culture that is, that has been under siege in its own home for several centuries but has survived because it has always given birth to great minds that have acted as barriers against floods of counter-culture ideas that have off and on been swamping the vulnerable, intrinsically pluralistic, Hindu mind.

In these four lectures – 'Nativism,' 'Modernity,' 'Orality (Native Styles),' 'Marathi Novel' – and two appendices, Nemade seeks to ward off the onslaught of 'Modernity' (p.14.) on the already battered Hindu mind. His worries stem from what is rather uncommon among 'educated' Hindu intellectuals – the deep respect in which he holds what he calls (p.11) 'the oldest civilization of the world', the 'Vedic' civilization, though that one word is not used.

The apparent subject, the immediate concern, of course is the metropolitan Indian literary culture that has constituted itself following the contact with the West. It is a culture in which – (i) 'language controls literature'

(rather than the other way round)); (ii) there is critical bankruptcy (uncritical acceptance of and exclusive use of western frameworks to the almost complete exclusion of the long unbroken tradition of Indian literary thinking; (iii) uses borrowed themes and forms; (iv) is expressly addressed to, panders to, the western audience); (v) denigrates the Indian self-hood, and (vi) is in disjunction with the lived life of the Indian peoples. This 'literary culture' is a symptom of the much deeper malaise – the subordination of the Indian mind and academy to the West – 'suffocation'. From being a part of a long existing donor tradition, the Indian mind has become a receptacle of alien ideas having entered into a Theory – Data relationship with the Western academia. Denial of self-hood by the 'educated' Indian, his virtual contempt for the self, is the marker of his modernization and 'internationalism'. It seems that the very consciousness has been coloured, the *citta* itself afflicted. The consequence is a cultural anomie, a split self, the old self atrophied with no new self to take its place, a confused Indian changing colours and caps from one event (sports!) to another. The product of this environment, particularly the education system, is an individual who at best is ignorant and at worst has contempt for everything Indian. Long ago, Max Mueller had noted (in his 1880s lectures to the ICS published as *What India can Teach Us*) how the Indian takes care to 'distance' himself from his heritage and Ananda Coomaraswamy talking about 'the educated Indian' in his *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* wryly commented in the footnote that 'that is how the victims of Indian education are described'. And much before that in 1812 in a letter to his father from Calcutta, Macaulay, talking of the School education in Calcutta, said that "Hindus who take this education have no respect left for their religion – much better than proselytisation". If anything, Hindu self-denigration is now endemic. Nemade's anxiety therefore is how, in the face of this onslaught, "to salvage and preserve the vestigial values and native ways of life: tolerance, pluralism, spiritual point of view, beauty and grace of individual traditions. . . ritual observances, folklore, art and architecture, language and literature. . ." (p.43).

And this is possible only when we cease, he says, to consider Indian Knowledge as an extension of, and free ourselves from, the mental bondage of Western knowledge paradigm which has so far been dominantly empiricist and reductionist. That is, we 'decolonize' by overthrowing the three imperatives of 'modernity', 'scriptalism' and 'internationalism', the cobwebs of the 'educated' Indian mind. The causes of this Hindu enslavement are – fascination with the written word and the translation of an essentially oral culture into scriptal

– witness patronizing scholars going into 'tribal' (*sic*) areas and impressively transcribing their narratives, turning a living emotional experience into a fossilized word. Second cause is the stifling of Indian expressiveness by mass adoption of English as if it were a native mother tongue of all Indians and, third, the official support to materialism and commercial values.

The way out is assertion of 'nativism'. Throughout his arguments, Nemade adds on to the semantic domain of *nativism* and places it in a configuration of *native*, *nativeness*, *nativistic* and *nativism*. *Nativism*, according to Nemade, does not have to be constructed – it is a pervasive social phenomenon in all societies, a geographical principle (attachment to land), an emotional principle (love for the country/people/practices), and a cultural principle of autonomy, an intellectual principle of assimilation and equilibrium and a social principle of differentia, plurality. In literature, *nativism* rejects the opposition between native and 'universal' (for all great 'universal' compositions were intrinsically native, addressed to their own people and age and in fact no work that is not native can become 'universal'), rejects the notion of World Literature as Anglo-American or European alone, rejects 'modernist' neurotic themes as alien to the Indian experience and philosophy of literature, and accords primacy to orality as the 'native style' – in sum rejects the metropolitan Indian literature as derivative and as out of tune with the lived life of the people.

There are objections; it is pointed out, to *nativism* objections that spring from 'bogus internationalism' – charges of 'narrow mindedness', narcissism and bigoted nationalism in the era of European/American 'globalization'. Several factors have contributed to the 'loss of faith in the so called third world' (p.24). And that is the new imperialism of the mind. One feels that this has been facilitated by the assiduously cultivated belief in 'modern' as a higher culture rather than as an alternative culture, a postulate that the Latin-American thinkers (Third World?) have now been strenuously arguing for more than a decade (see, Jorge Armand, *Beyond Modernity*, 2000, Merida, Venezuela: Universidad de Los Andes, p. 8. Mimeo). Nemade would happily, I am sure, look at, and analyse, these straws in the wind and feel somewhat reassured.

The case has been very convincingly argued by Nemade. No one can dispute, least of all the set of 'uncolonized' minds – and that set is growing even among the 'educated' – that instinctively see the truth of the author's anguish. I am close to him in age and have experienced the same anguish and have for years been arguing the same case though not perhaps in the same

focused and cogent manner as he has done. I may therefore risk saying that the problem with us is that at some stage we get defensive in that we try to argue often within the terminological frame of the paradigm we are contesting. The apparent 'reason' of the shibboleths of that paradigm – secularism, human rights, democracy, racism, genocide, equality, and so on – paralyse us and we are unable to take issue with these shibboleths. How can we argue against 'secularism', 'human rights', 'genocide' etc.? So we hedge. We do not boldly take on these 'charges' against the Hindu history, traditions and practices – let there be no doubt that in India these are directed against Hindus. We do not argue that India is 'secular' because wherever 10 persons are present, 8 are Hindus; we do not argue that that is also the reason why India is the only working Asian democracy; we do not argue that Hindu social political thought never accepted 'slavery' as a human practice (contrast it with Aristotle's *Politics*). What may be the clearest statement of egalitarian political ideology only comes to us through many intermediaries, as a tantalizing passage in Diodorus Siculus (2.39; *Classical Accounts*, p. 236) which seems to derive from Megasthenes: "Of several remarkable customs existing among the Indians, there is one prescribed by their [sc. Indian] ancient philosophers which one may regard as truly admirable: for the law ordains that no one among them shall, under any circumstances, be a slave, but that, enjoying freedom, they shall respect the principle of equality in all persons: for those, they thought, who have learned neither to domineer over nor to cringe to others will attain the life best adapted for all vicissitudes of lot: since it is silly to make laws on the basis of equality of all persons and yet to establish inequalities in social intercourse." We do not argue that the Hindu mind goes far beyond human rights, to the rights of all beings, *jiva*. We do not assert that the assumption that this is among the 'ultimates' in Political Theory and in Ethics is open to debate as also their actual practice on the ground. For example the anthropocentric view that if man encroaches on the elephant or leopard country and that elephant or the leopard retaliates, it is the elephant or the leopard that should be shot does not make sense in the traditional Hindu thought in general and the Jaina value system in particular (though now it does make sense to the *de-culturised* Hindus) as these non-western thought systems talk of the *rights of all living beings*. Why is the human being so important? Because he has mastered the gun? We do not assert that the societies that are using 'human rights' as a whip today are guilty of having practiced slavery throughout their history till 19th century. We do not assert that the principle of 'rights' is a self-centered *conflict oriented* principle and

generates, has generated violence. *Contra* 'rights' we have the time-honoured Indian core construct of 'duty,' the other-centered harmony-promoting principle that sets up for many young educated Indians a contradiction between the School and the Home. Without denying the injustice that developed in the actual practice of *Varna* system, we do not tell them not to transfer their guilt of 'genocide' of the Jews to us and that the Hindus have in fact been victims of attested genocide over centuries. In fact any critique of the Western civilization annoys the Indian intellectual no end – he is happy only in self-denigration. Centuries of oppression that Hindus suffered and the repeated defeats in the battle field have altered the Hindu character – he is now the opposite of what Al-Beruni had said he was – the Hindu always speaks the truth, he said; the Hindu is proud of his knowledge; the Hindu is not afraid to die. Where have those people gone? Like the Jews, the other persecuted race, Hindu self is a fractured self. In other words, "the fault dear Brutus is not in our stars that we are underlings".

There are, therefore, some caveats to be introduced in Nemade's discourse and some contestables - conceptual, terminological and assumptive. To begin with, I think there is claustrophobia in the structure of feeling. If we get out of 'Delhi-vision' and 'Tele-vision', we find that our culture is fighting back very resolutely. Nemade himself points out that the Hindu mind does not throw out anything, that it tests the new things that come, that it sifts and assimilates what is in harmony with its core. I think that is happening at this time. For the second time, after Islam, the Indian culture has confronted a powerful alternative culture and thought system and for almost 200 years now, the processes of emergence, submergence, assertion, modification, adaptation, rejection and assimilation have been going on. It is like the confluence of two streams – the two run parallel for some time and you can see two different colours for some time. And then a mixed colour and finally one of the colours, an inflected colour again dominates and the river has that colour then. Those who have been to Devaprayaga will actually see this – two turbulent streams, Bhagirathi and Alakananda, meet and after a stretch of flow, the colour of Bhagirathi is the colour of Ganga. I see this very clearly in our young girls, who are in any case the most vibrant section of Hindu society – it is not uncommon to see a young jeans-clad, mobile-wielding, car-driving young multi-national executive first offering flowers in the small society temple, then getting into her car and driving off. And this is the section that has been 'westernised'.

Some of the contestable, to mention, in view of the space-time coordinate, only a few are: (i) the use of words such as 'Brahmanical' and 'Brahmanism' that in our

'modern' discourse always show a lack of de-synonymising between 'Brahmin' as caste and 'Brahmin' as *sampradaya*, a school of philosophy (in disputation through India's intellectual history with Buddhist and Jaina *sampradayas*) and we must remember that Buddha, contrary to the popular impression, had deep respect for Brahmins (as caste) – read the *Jatakas*. Equation of *varna* and *jati* (they are not the same) belong here.

(ii) expressions such as 'Brahmin dominated Hindu society' (p.32), a notion deliberately cultivated by the British in 19th century as 'state policy' and continued in free/partitioned India by the present dispensation, need to be expounded and debated.

(iii) the reading of India's intellectual history on page 49, is highly contestable in the matter of ideational relationship between Vedas, Upanishads, 'early Brahmanical cults' (?), Jain and Buddhist systems, 'classical Brahmanism' (?) – the quick summary on page 49 does no justice either to the rich textual tradition or the density of thought therein. Many intellectuals are prone to summarizing what will take decades to read and understand.

(iv) one wishes that Nemade had not made statements such as ". . . even the purely Kshatriya documents such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* . . . began to flaunt *Ahimsa*. Rama after killing Ravana, says, *Ahimsa paramo dharmah*: and another warrior hero Yuddhisthira at the end of mass destruction of life, deliberates with the *Rishis* in *Shantiparva* on *shanti*. . . Then in the second millennium, numerous *Bhakti* cults . . . rebelliously continue to re-inforce Jain, Buddhist and several other *Nastika* ways of life suppressed by Brahmanism." Well! This is swashbuckling opinion-making—every verb and noun is contestable in this and there is a hint of lack of intimacy with major intellectual texts. Shows that even in Nemade, a modernist lurks.

To cut the story short. Bi-polarities are the bane of western humanist-sociological mind – their modern science has successfully gone beyond that (*More Are Different* is a celebrated book by a scientist). The Indian mind nurtured in, what has always been since ancient days, a multiple, pluralistic, pluri-theistic, multi-linguistic and multi-belief system has never functioned in either-or mode or in the linear mode – cyclicity and configuration are basic drivers of the Hindu mind. One who wants to contest the other paradigm must operate with his own categories as was the rule in Indian *vada parampara*. It isn't India or West even now – it is *more* and *different*. And what would you say to the TV, a western invention that is perfect fit for India's *shravya-preksha* orality.

Let us wait. Oral cultures have in built mechanisms of recovery. And as it is, strong cultures resist both kinds of

loss – that due to the text-internal factors and that due to the text-external, contextual factors - to preserve culturally central systems of ideas.

NOTES

1. Recent and contemporary Western Theory is in fact *conflict centered*. Post-Renaissance, it successively substituted for the Pre-Renaissance God-Man adversarial relationship, first the adversarial Man-Nature relationship (witness Descartes in *On Method*: "The goal of knowledge is to bend nature to man's purpose"), then the adversarial Man-Man relationship (witness Marx's class war) and now of late the adversarial Man-Woman relationship. *Conflict* of course has been sanctified post- Karl Marx as the necessary condition of progress, again something debatable.

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Shreesh Chaudhary, *Foreigners and Foreign Languages in India – a Sociolinguistic History*, New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009. pp. 586. Rs. 950

Foreigners and Foreign Languages in India by Shreesh Chaudhary deals with the sociolinguistic history of the Indian subcontinent from the earliest encounters with Sanskrit and Greek to the English of the British colonizers. Within this long linguistic and cultural interaction is about one thousand years of Arabic, Turkish but mainly Persian period followed by the development of Urdu. Shreesh Chaudhary has done a highly commendable job in recounting this linguistic narrative with profusely documented situations where the native speakers assimilated the foreign idioms. It is also very interesting to note that the native elite never took long to adapt itself to the emerging circumstances of new political realities. It was almost with great enthusiasm that they learnt, practiced and communicated in the language of the colonizer.

The present day linguistic situation is very well described by Chaudhary when he talks about his grandson's sociolinguistic interactions :

My son's son, Rishabh, born in 1998, attends an English school in Hyderabad. He speaks Maithili with his father, me and my wife; Bengali with his mother and her parents; English, Hindi and Telugu with his friends. He watches English, Hindi and Telugu programmes on the television and plays computer games in English.

This sociolinguistic interaction, with some local

variations, is true of all children in the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, its political and cultural implications have never been properly understood by those who pretend to be the guardians of our socio-political organizations. For them, for all those who fought for the freedom of the country and later became its rulers, consciously or unconsciously, the European model with one language, one culture, one nation remained the ideal model of a political city state. Instead of dividing the Indian subcontinent into a few hundred administrative units with English as its administrative language, the language of one region was elevated to the status of the official and national language of the entire subcontinent. This political blunder resulted in disastrous consequences. Other linguistic regions reacted violently and the country was divided into several linguistic states with enormous political power. As all administrative work was supposed to be conducted in the regional languages, the states became hermetically sealed for all outsiders, the citizens of the same country.

In the ancient times, the Indian subcontinent was divided into several thousand princely states or political units. Whenever a foreign power invaded India, it imposed a unitary form of administration and language on the area conquered by it. As a result, the number of states was gradually reduced and more uniform administrative units came into being. With the British, it extended from Afghanistan to Burma with Ceylon and Nepal also a part of the same set up. If the narrow sectarian interests had not played havoc with the political aspirations of our people, this whole region would have been today one federal republic of the Indian subcontinent.

In this context, Afghanistan is extremely important. In ancient India, this region was the cultural centre of our people. Afghanistan was the preeminent centre of Sanskrit language and culture in Paninian times. It was also the greatest centre of Buddhist art and culture. Subsequently, the cultural and religious colours changed. But the history of a people is not just the history of one community or religion or language. The Indian subcontinent, very different from the European homogenous linguistic and ethnic states, has always been a multilingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious region. No micro regional language or culture ever dominated its entire political space. It was always due to a given foreign administration that larger and larger units were formed. The normal course would have been to inherit this politico-historical legacy. Unfortunately, this was not to be. None of our great leaders had the intellectual and political vision of a Bharat that could extend from Afghanistan to Burma with

Ceylon and Nepal as its integral parts. And, yet, it was all there to take it if we had not been mentally stuck with our extremely narrow sectarian interests. There was one administrative language, one administrative block, fashioned by the vicissitudes of history over a thousand years of political upheavals. From the very beginning of the freedom struggle, this historical evolution was ignored. Our leaders dreamt only of a Paninian India of 500 BC with uniform language and culture.

This excellent book of Shreesh Chaudhary traces the history of these linguistic transformations during the last two thousand years but maybe it is too late to have any impact on modern India. His grandson may speak several languages with his friends in a fluid colloquial register, but for all that matters, for official work as an administrator or the one who has to deal with him, he has no choice but to have a very high level of proficiency of discourse in one regional language, only to throw it in the cultural dustbin when he moves to another region-state. This multi-ethnic, multi-cultural entity that is India is now a linguistically highly compartmentalized country with hermetically sealed communicative channels.

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Pradeep Trikha, *Multiple Celebrations, Celebrating Multiplicity: Girish Karnad*, Ajmer: A.R.A.W.LII. Publications, 2009. pp.92. pb. Rs.400

When Girish Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in 1964 to mitigate the lack of plays on a historical theme on the Kannada stage, he was bringing a consciousness which was extremely attuned to the realities of his times. Though written during his stint at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, Karnad's *Tughlaq* is not merely a faithful portrayal of the times and experiments of a troubled ruler in the pre-Mughal subcontinent. He brought into the script the dilemmas of modern India – clashes between the ideals of the then Prime Minister Nehru and the powerful classes who were suspicious of his motives, the desire to build a secular polity in a society which was deeply divided by the scars of partition. When Karnad wrote the play he was utterly unsure of it being staged. So he let his creative energies loose, conceiving scenes of epic proportions, requiring a large cast. Yet *Tughlaq* has been performed regularly through the decades traversing the changing political climate of independent India – the

India of Indira Gandhi and the imposition of draconian internal emergency in 1975, the era of Rajiv Gandhi's vision of the twenty first century, but mired in several controversies, the communal tension of the nineties with the ugly and shameful face witnessed in Gujarat in 2002. At each stage directors have sought to seek interpretations from the text which have made the play seem to be well-suited for commentary on the contemporary events. Such renewal of relevance becomes possible because Karnad had not attempted a superficial mirroring of history or contemporary reality, or a mere universalisation of the themes in the play. His analysis in *Tughlaq* historicised the action, the characters and the relationships. It is only by being steadfastly faithful to its period of representation that the play becomes timeless in its relevance.

Tughlaq has been staged in varied performance conditions. From the first production at the Indian National Theatre in Bombay in 1965, to Ebrahim Alkazi's memorable production for the National School of Drama (NSD) Repertory at the ruins of Purana Qila in 1974, to Prasanna's 1982 production for the NSD – the play has allowed the opening up of varied new dimensions. While the Purana Qila staging brought out the historical resonances within the ambience of this pre-Mughal fort, Prasanna's decision to use the string curtain to divide the performance space between the street and the court, between the plebeian and the aristocracy, returned to the play Karnad's adoption of the original performance traditions of the "Comapany Natak" and the Parsi theatre.

Tughlaq thus becomes a play which, while being unique in its particular respects, is representative of an entire generation of modern Indian theatre in the decades of 1960s and 70s, which was in search of developing newer idioms, borrowing and adapting from traditional performance forms of the country, striving to represent and analyse on the stage the realities and contradictions of independent India.

It would be difficult to reach an adequate understanding of the importance of *Tughlaq* and the meanings it generates without attention to its performance conditions and contexts. Yet that is what Pradeep Trikha attempts to achieve in the monograph which is the subject of this review. Trikha's survey of Karnad's dramatic career on the basis of textual reading of the scripts. Though this by itself cannot be considered a demerit it could be seen as the limitation of the work.

Trikha offers a fresh perspective on the symbolism in Karnad's work from the point of view of a contemporary reader who seeks to correlate the plays to today's realities like the return to critical interest in mythologies and religion, the increased communication in a cyberworld

and a simultaneous distancing of individuals. In fact, one of the virtues of Trikha's criticism is that he focuses on Karnad's recent work. The chapterisation follows a thematic rather than chronological order. The first chapter 'Karnad via Girish: The Playwright Iconised' introduces the reader to the Karnad's recent plays like *Bali*, *The Sacrifice* and *Wedding Album* and locates them within the recent developments in the world of Indian theatre. Trikha's analysis of *Wedding Album* builds on Karnad's portrayal of the desire of the mother to fetch NRI grooms for her daughters, by connecting it to the dowry market in India where grooms of various accomplishments are sold to the highest bidder. Trikha demonstrates how Karnad as a social physician is able to diagnose the maladies of the Indian society and recommend remedies.

Chapter Two focuses on the reworking of myths and folklores in *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala* and *The Fire and the Rain*. The 'new', the contemporary is given the treatment of the 'old', the mythical and the folkloric, as the myth and the present interpret each other. Trikha pays particular attention to the indictment of patriarchal society and the sense of insecurity which results from the control over women.

The study of modern relationships in what Trikha terms the 'cyber-spaced world' is the subject of the third chapter, where he studies some of Karnad's recent plays – *Broken Images*, *Flowers* and *Wedding Album*. The love triangle and the dissipation of the idea of the home is shown to hurt the modern woman. Trikha demonstrates Karnad's use of language in shaping characters who gradually lose control over themselves.

Karnad's use of historical subjects to comment on the present concerns Trikha in the next two chapters. He goes behind the texts to reveal the well researched nature of the plays like *Tughlaq* and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*. But the plays do not remain splendid documentation of the past, but Karnad's ability to rework elements of history allow him to make his plays contemporary. According to Trikha *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* being written in English for the BBC to mark India's independence presents simultaneously a paradox as well as an opportunity. He celebrates Karnad's bilingualism which is an uncanny representation of half a century of independent India. The play itself is a bringing forward of the historical resistance to the erstwhile colonial masters. Yet Karnad's mastery shows how Tipu's dreams, influenced by Western ideas, were the source of his downfall.

Though Trikha's monograph is a tribute to a playwright he admires, his prose is not inspired by Karnad's mastery of narratives. He moves uncontrollably from one point to another without allowing each one to register itself before the reader. On more than one

occasion one is left wondering if the chapterisation is of any consequence. If Trikha's bumpy prose is not enough, the numerous typographical errors are bound to catch attention.

There are also some statements in the book which give away an element of thoughtlessness. Trikha describes *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* in Aristotelian terms as a play that leaves the audience purged 'from their passions spent and calm of mind restored'. Immediately afterward he states that in the play, 'Karnad, like Brecht intends to "break down the emphatic link between spectator and performer"' (p.72). Trikha finds no contradiction between Aristotelian and Brechtian methods. While discussing the passion of the masses in *Tughlaq* he suggests that Karnad's play helps interpret the communalism of the 1990s in India which has 'to an extent effected (sic) secular image of Hinduism' (p.62. My emphasis)!

The book opens with a Foreword by G.J.V. Prasad which traces Karnad as a bilingualist, as someone who is deft in both English and Kannad, and able to move from one language to another with ease. Prasad refers to Karnad's beginnings at Oxford to lay stress on his return to India even though the promise of a different fame beckoned him in the form of representing India in English, the diasporic route adopted by many. Karnad's return to India brought him in company with generation of playwrights who together transformed the modern Indian stage.

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Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, Noida: Harper Collins India, 2008. pp. 321. Rs. 395

Arvind Adiga's debut novel *The White Tiger* created many a ripple when it bagged the Man Booker for Fiction for 2008. The Booker Committee judges praised it as a "new voice", an eye-opener with rare insight and sound ending. The western reviewers were tickled by the "chatty" murderer protagonist's exposé of "the underbelly of India's tiger economy"; his ability to lift the lid off the "economic miracle" of India and the courage to show its darker aspects.

The Indian reviewers were not as amused though. For some the novel is "inauthentic", for others just "tedious and unfunny slog." Many question Adiga's credentials as an insider-outsider to write about India. Son of a doctor, and having lived and studied primarily in the USA, England and Australia his knowledge about "real

India" seems to be limited to media coverage, contend his critics.

The novel tells the story of one Balram Halwai, resident of Laxmangarh in Gaya district. In school it is drummed into them that they are lucky to belong to a place where Lord Buddha received "Light". Balram contends, however, that it is Darkness they are doomed to live in. Balram recounts how he learnt to dream big, got out of Darkness and became a successful entrepreneur. But unfortunately, his is not the usual rag to riches tale worth emulating. It is not even a crime-thriller. It is a grim and angry narrative in epistolary form. The letters are written to the Chinese Premier in the course of seven nights. Balram Halwai is not "an original thinker" but he is "an original listener." As Mr. Ashok's chauffeur he picks up a few useful tricks and becomes adept at turning everything to his advantage. As a fugitive murderer he fears detection but knowing the working of our law enforcing machinery, he is relaxed and chooses to narrate his tale to the visiting Premier.

With his mordant humor, bitter sarcasm and amusing observations the protagonist reveals his march from childhood to manhood, from his innocent past to his corrupt present. Reading on, we put the pieces together and know that his father was an impoverished rickshaw-puller but he had a dream — to educate his son, so that "he should live like a man." But Balram cannot continue his education, he has to work as teashop boy. His parents die untimely death spewing blood lying in a dirty government hospital without medical aid. The narrative goes to and fro and we find ourselves interested further in him, to know how a child who cannot see even a lizard being killed and whose biggest boyhood ideal/idol is the bus conductor, Vijay (with his Khaki uniform and a shining whistle) becomes an inveterate murderer and a grabbing entrepreneur. That is what keeps us glued to the story.

Balram tells a few key points to the readers in the beginning: first, he is a fugitive murderer; second, the police are after him; and third, he cannot be caught as long as he has the "brown" envelop and there are officials ready to accept it. Another significant pointer pertains to his identity. He starts his life without a name but amazingly, he acquires four identities that come handy to him in his chequered career.

His parents call him Munna but since it is not a real name the teacher decides on Balram. Soon, impressed by his quickness the school Inspector calls him "White Tiger" a rare species in "this jungle" of idiots (p.35). In Delhi his rustic ways earn him an appellation "Country-Mouse". Subsequently, he becomes — Ashok — and flourishes as Ashok Sharma, the entrepreneur. Once the school

Inspector had gifted him a book entitled *Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi* which he never read but unfortunately, he becomes a regular reader of the *Murder Weekly* handed down by his driver friends.

This otherwise grim murder story becomes amusing with Arvind Adiga's acute sense of humor. Balram boasts to the Chinese Premier that one day India will beat China in progress because we may not have drinking water, good roads, sewage system, Olympic Gold medals but we have democracy. It is another matter that our democracy is run by beastly musclemen, upstarts like the conductor-turned-politician, and the Great Socialist with ninety-three criminal cases pending against him.

The novel works on irony: Balram, who is a victim of the malevolent system never thinks of heralding change when he gets wealth, albeit by criminal means. He adopts with ease the devious ways of the corrupt whom he has detested all along. He has chalked out his plan to move from one enterprise to another: from Call Center Taxi business he will shift to real estate and thereafter open a school where the children will be taught *great lessons* of life and not about Gandhi or Buddha. One shudders to think of an educational institution run by a semi-literate, unscrupulous murderer.

Witty turns of phrase, mordant humour and acute observations give strength to the story to hold readers' interest. Balram is unrepentant, "I'll never say I made a mistake that night. . . when I slit my master's throat. I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for

an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (pp.320-21). But somewhere in his heart he seems to be sorry for his master. He is a restless man troubled by nightmares and uncertainty. Still he makes things light. He never appears worried and here we cannot but appreciate his tenacity as he closes his narrative with the declaration, "I think I am ready to have children, Mr. Premier" (p.321). We keep down the book with a big, disturbing question before us: what kind of progeny will he produce?

Writing for *Times Literary Supplement*, Sameer Rahim observes that the novel resembles the stories of the *Murder Weekly* which feed Balram's imagination, "quick, entertaining and full of vividly drawn types: the scheming servant, the corrupt businessman, the spoilt wife."

To be fair to Adiga, however, let us say that whatever be the merits and demerits of *The White Tiger*, it cannot be denied that it raises some pressing social issues and though we find it hard to sympathize with Adiga's villainous protagonist we cannot but appreciate the caustic humour with which he exposes the ever widening social gaps, the corroding political system and the erosion of values. "I'm tomorrow," Adiga has Balram utter with confidence. Will this be the signal of our future – corrupt, unscrupulous and devilish?

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