

Book Reviews

The Inner Mirror: Kannada Writings on Society and Culture, compiled and edited by A. R. Vasavi, New Delhi: The Book Review Literary Trust, 2009, pp. x+205, Rs. 395, ISBN: 81-88434-04-3

In the contemporary Kannada writings "Mirror" is one of the metaphors that reflects Kannada's negotiation with other languages. "No more Mirrors only Lamps", *When Window becomes Mirror*, are the titles of an article and a book respectively in Kannada published in 1990s and 2000s. Whether we have started seeing ourselves through other languages is the concern that K.V. Narayan is expressing in his article when he calls for other languages to perform the role of a lamp rather than a mirror. Similarly Sanskrit, which was supposed to be the window through which various kinds of knowledge were supposed to enter into Kannada became a model for Kannada, thus molding Kannada like Sanskrit - this is the theme of a book by another scholar T.R.S. Sharma. The book under review aptly titled "The Inner Mirror," takes an informed position in the ongoing debate on language and knowledge.

The present decade has also seen an intense debate on the status of social sciences in India, and a sense of crisis of social science research is being perceived. In an empirical fashion, scholars have attributed the "decline" of social science education in India to the vernacularization of higher education, whereby the students and research scholars are unable to seriously engage with the knowledge produced in English and which consequently gets reflected partially or superficially. To get over this anomaly, the Knowledge Commission of India had recommended setting up of a National Translation Mission (NTM) in the XI plan period which is now busy in translating "social science" knowledge thus far available only in English into Indian languages.

Since the publication of Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978), and the advent of Post-colonial theory

coupled with post-structuralism, it is said that the social science knowledge on India produced since 19th century on India has been complicit with colonial power. It is also well demonstrated that this knowledge was derived from often obscure Sanskrit texts rediscovered by the Indologists in 18th and 19th century, which were hardly in current circulation or practice. Though the postcolonial discourse was able to rewrite some of our understanding of colonialism and nationalism, it couldn't escape the language bind of the colonial creation. It was in Anthropology that some serious debate on the issues of language in understanding other societies was raised and the debate on subject-object relations was renewed. Location of the researcher and the language of the researcher were put into critical scrutiny re-examining the "truth claims" of such research.

Even the new Dalit studies scholarship that is emerging in Indian social science is problematizing the notion of theory and practice and argues for theorizing the practices through the experiential knowledge of the researcher rather than relying on the existing theories to comprehend the experience of self or other. In a sense this debate reminds one of categories such as "critical insider", "organic intellectual" etc.

The book under review has come out in this context and assumes a lot of significance for the above mentioned debates. The book was published under the series "Present Continuous" which is a corollary to the series "Past Continuous" published by The Book Review Literary Trust. It is compiled and edited by A.R. Vasavi, a well known social anthropologist, working on Karnataka. The volume provides fresh inputs and points of reference to the ongoing debate. It has 15 articles translated from Kannada into English under 5 rubrics uniformly including 3 articles under each rubric. The rubrics under which the articles have been arranged deal with contemporary issues that social sciences in India have taken up for research in the last couple of decades or so, and are related to the burning issues in the Indian society too.

Vasavi, the editor of the book, drawing upon her social science training, argues for seriously considering the insights that society obtains through its own mechanisms, along with the knowledge one produces through “objective” analysis. In her introduction she refers to her extensive fieldwork to argue that we need to take this body of writing as “social commentaries” if not as social science. The book seems to be making a case for social scientists to seriously take this body of literature within the ambit of their research work. She in effect argues for “pluralizing the Sociology of India” by taking into account Indian language writings on society and culture.

The selection of essays from Kannada, focuses on the current debates in social science in general, thus aiming to provide the social scientists in India, an “inner mirror” where they can cross-check their understanding of these issues. These issues are highly topical in the contemporary Kannada/Karnataka scenario. The essays that Vasavi has chosen for translation into English are writings from the 1980s onwards. Most of the writers have in a way performed the ‘critical insider-outsider’ role in Kannada society since the 1970s (Tejaswi, Subbanna, Devanoor Mahadeva, D.R. Nagaraj, Baraguru Ramachandrappa, Ananthamurthy, Kambar etc., all of them acclaimed litterateurs; the last two have been awarded with Jnanapeeth). But it has also chosen, apart from this 70s intellectual crop, people who started writing in 80s like Murari Ballala, K.V.Narayana, G. Rajashekar, H.S. Raghavendra Rao, and people who came to prominence in 90s such as, Rahamat Tarikere, T.R. Chandrashekar and Mogalli Ganesh. In that sense it reflects the critical edge that Kannada society has developed to introspect in the past three decades. The issues covered range from Kannada nationalism, language issues covered under the rubric “Contestations: Region, Language and Religion”; questions of religion, secularism, spirituality covered under the rubric “Religiosity: In Moral, Rational and Fundamental Worlds”; issues of social hierarchy and challenges to it under the rubric “Re-casting Caste: New Identities and Mobilisation”; issues of Gender under the rubric “Women: Personhood, Identity and Agency”; and issues related to Modernity and Development under the rubric “Modernity and Development in Locality”. Thus the selection is fairly representative both in terms of issues covered and the choice of the authors. One could argue that there could have been more women in the section related to Gender, but it is not a comment on the essays that are included in the section.

In sum *Inner Mirror* tries to contribute to the corrective measures that Indian social science need to take up in the context of several crucial issues raised within it, which

I have mentioned in the beginning. It is high time that we move away from the colonial frame and see our society not only through external mirrors but also through our inner mirrors. Language, of course, has to play a crucial role in it. We must dismiss the idea that knowledge exists only in English and perceiving Indian languages as passive recipients. The Indian language writings on society have much to offer to English in general and social sciences in particular. The series editors have aptly called this series “Present Continuous”, where Indian language writings engage, along with English, on equal terms in the production of knowledge.

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G. D. Gulati, *Central Asia under the Mongols*, New Delhi: Dev Books, 2010, pp. 209, Rs. 600.

The issues relating to the history of the Mongol empire, its social, economic life, trade and interaction with the neighbouring cultures within the vast spaces of Asia and Europe were always a subject of analysis by various scholars worldwide, such as V. Barthold, T. Allsen, R. Foltz, H. Yule and many others. The book by G.D. Gulati deals with the topic of the history of the Mongols in Central Asia, in particular of Chaghatai Khanate, its interactions with the contiguous China and India and the role the commercial network played in this part of the world.

In his introduction the author defines Central Asia from both geographical and historical perspectives. It seems to be valuable since throughout ages the concept of Central Asia changed dramatically, depending on the twists and turns of its history and political mapping. Gulati rightly suggests that from the historical geography viewpoint the definition of Central Asia as a region comprising of 5 former Soviet, now independent republics, is a narrow definition (p.2).

Although there is no unanimity among scholars about the region’s precise definition, delete, it could be referred to the vast area stretching from China (Tibet and Xinjiang) and Mongolia on the east; northern India, Afghanistan in the south; north-eastern Iran and Caspian Sea in the west; Ural mountains in the north; with its so called “heartland” comprising of five republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, different parts of which in history were variably known as Transoxiana (or Mawarannahr in Arabic), Desht-i-Kipchak, Turan, Turkestan.

The geography of Central Asia is striking for its variety, be it cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic. Being a mixture of various cultural layers, notably, nomadic and settled ones, the region has had always deep links with the adjoining territories, especially with the so called frontier zones with Chinese, Indian, Persian and Russian cultures. It is not surprising that in the course of its history this interaction became its certain trademark. The history of the Mongol Empire proved this well.

One of the prominent features associated with the Mongol Empire could be described as a two-way traffic related to the simultaneous processes of externalization and internalization. Externalization of the Empire stretched from the Far East to Central Europe and East Mediterranean (what Chingiz Khan reckoned as a one year's journey!) meant what from today's perspective could be described as an aspect of globalization. The Mongol Empire covering almost half of the then known world of that time, managed to unite (although unevenly) different cultural centres and civilizations – Arabic, Chinese, European, Persian and Russian. This allows Gulati to rightly stress that “close contacts occurred between countries that had hitherto hardly known of each other's existence, on account of their geographical situation and the unsafe conditions that had formerly prevailed... The whole of Asia was opened up; trade in particular benefited from the new order... These rulers...brought about a large measure of security and peace, named the *Pax Mongolica*” (p. 37).

On the other hand, it was inevitable that the Mongols had to experience the other process – of internalization or the regionalization. The administration and proper management (political, economic, and ideological) over the vast lands implied the usage of already available mechanisms of governing that existed on the conquered areas – be it local elites' service, unchanged political structure or religions. As Gulati mentions, “the retention of a local dynasty and its attendant administrative apparatus was often the most practical method of controlling and exploiting the population and resources of a newly surrendered territory” (p. 35).

As far as the general notion of culture is concerned, it should be highlighted here that (according to this two-way flow of externalization and internalization the Mongols became a prominent force in both establishing their rule and culture on the one hand, and adjusting to the already existing and flourishing cultural patterns, on the other. It means that the Mongols as nomads were able to perform dual functions in the course of their interaction on the enormous territories they conquered. There could not be the other way round. The broad context - geography, history and culture of the conquered areas – dictated that in each place the Mongols had to be flexible

to sustain their rule and power. The degree of this flexibility, in its turn, depended on the compatibility of the Mongolian and the conquered cultures. As a result of this one could witness the variety of forms evolving from this interplay ranging from the superimposition of both nomadic Mongolian and Turk cultures (in Chaghatai Khanate), to the cultural “acculturation” of Qubilai and Hulagu to the Chinese (Yuan dynasty) and Persian (Ilkhans) cultural milieus respectively.

From the “cultural lenses” the history of the Mongols could also be regarded as a bright sample of the long process of cultural change from domination towards adaptation and final adjustment to the “subdued” culture. The nomadic perception of the world developed by the Mongols allowed them to rather flexibly build their relations on the new territories whether it came to the system of administration, policy, ideology or culture itself. The division of the Mongol Empire into four main khanates as it was left by Chingiz Khan to his sons showed the main lines of this interaction: 1) The Great Khanate (in East Asia with the capital in Karaqorum in Mongolia), of which Qubilai (1260-94) later ruled over China after 1279 (the Mongols' were overthrown in China in 1368 by the Ming dynasty); 2) the Chaghatai (second son of Chingiz Khan, ruled 1227-1242) Khanate (in heartland of Central Asia); 3) the Khanate of Persia (the Ilkhans Dynasty, built by Hulagu, grandson of Chingiz Khan, in 1258); and 4) the Khanate of Kipchak (Golden Horde in Russian Steppes, built by Batu, grandson of Chingiz Khan, ruled 1227-1255).

The author rightly suggests this division (p. 40) and makes an attempt to briefly trace the history of the Chaghatai Khanate, specifically pointing out that “the only truly Central Asian and nomadic vision of the Mongol Empire was the apanage of Chingiz Khan's second son, Chaghatai” (p. 45). It was exactly here, in the so called heartland of Central Asia, where the Mongolian nomadic spirit smoothly blended with the similar nomadic cultural pattern. The Mongol invasion made it possible to mould cultural patterns of the Mongols and the Turks (also known by its nomadic as well as settled legacy), which paved the way for an entirely new yet still very profound mixture of nomadic and settled cultures. In this case it could be said that the Mongols, rather easily accentuated and brought a new life towards the existing cultural pattern of the Turks, thus greatly contributing to and strengthening a totally new cultural pattern. As Gulati correctly mentions “the Mongols under the appendage of Chaghatai, had by then become Turkish in language and Muslim in religion and had transferred their social emphasis from the steppe to the oasis” (p. 63).

This cultural pattern very soon became a prominent one, giving rise to another wave of mixed nomadic-settled spirit that was later able to withstand the struggle with own brethren and even launch new conquests to the south – to India and Afghanistan. “It was the Chaghatais who sent their expeditions into the far distant places of Hindustan. It is the same region where we find Timur rising in power...” (p. 41). Due to these factors and bearing in mind the title of the book, it is not surprising that Gulati pays special attention to the history of Chaghatai Khanate in a separate chapter of the book.

On the contrary, the destiny of the Mongols in the contiguous areas, like in China and Persia, was rather different. The Qubilai reign in China, also known as the Yuan dynasty, in Chinese historiography became a bright exponent of the role the culture plays in the process of adjustment to different environment. In fact, the Yuan dynasty became so much “acculturated” to the already existing and highly developed Chinese cultural pattern that later, in the history of China, it was regarded as just one of the numerous Chinese dynasties. The same could be referred to the Ilkhan dynasty in Persia, whose founder and ruler Hulagu also became so adjusted to the already existed highly developed Persian culture that he, in a similar way as Qubilai Khan did, stood against the “primordial” and true Mongolian nomadic spirit. Gulati rightly mentions that the houses of Qubilai and Hulagu “had found at their disposal the age old tradition of ancient centralized empires – whole history of administrative customs of *yamens* and *divans*. They became the sons of Heaven here, sultans there...” (p. 53).

This fact of rather quick (within just few decades) acculturation by Qubilai (who was proclaimed the Great Khan of all Mongols) and his house was witnessed by the contemporaries, other descendants of Chinghiz khan as an act of betrayal of the true nomadic spirit and legacy of the Mongols. The shift of the capital of the Mongol Empire from Karaqorum in Mongolia to Peking in China added to the resentment of Mongol chieftains and especially Qaidu (grandson of Mongol Khan Ogedei, 1235-1301, who became the most relentless opponent to the reign of Qubilai), who stood against Qubilai’s policy of rapid sinification. As Gulati highlights, “Qaidu represented the Mongolian nomadic values that threatened the increasingly sedentary Mongolian dynasty in China. He favoured the pastoral nomadic society rather than the sedentary agricultural society ruled by a Central Government and staffed by a bureaucracy” (p. 69). Gulati stresses this fact while describing in chapter 4 the relations with China. Supporting his argument by various mediaeval sources he depicts uneasy relationships between Great Khan Qubilai and notably Qaidu.

In fact, the whole history of the Mongols after Chinghiz khan could be described as the constant tug-of-war where the price for the winner was not only the power and control over the vast areas, but from cultural point of view, an affirmation of certain cultural patterns. The almost 30+ year struggle between Qaidu and Qubilai houses perfectly shows the main lines of this tension.

In chapter 5 the author covers the issue of Indian campaigns undertaken by the Mongols and tries to find an answer to the question why the Mongols didn’t finally succeed on the Indian subcontinent. It seems that Gulati follows the commonly accepted opinion that mainly climate and geography were among the crucial factors preventing the Mongols from advancing further to the southern plains. As “In Western Europe and even in Hungary there were not enough pastures for the Mongol cavalry and stock. India too, was unsuited climatically and geographically for Mongol style of nomadism” (p. 81). Gulati depicts the history of the Mongols’ attempt to conquer India starting from Multan and south of the Himalayas in 1221 by Chinghiz khan, occupation of Lahore in 1241 by Ogedei khan, and later, in 1290s by Qaidu in alliance with Dawa Khan, a descendant of Chaghatai, who invaded Punjab and made a siege of Delhi in 1300 and 1303. Giving the chief reasons of the Mongols’ defeat in India Gulati follows the standpoint stressing particularly: internal struggle among the Mongol rulers of different houses; the extinction of the bravery of early Mongols in later period; uncertainty and disorder in Transoxiana followed by the death of Dawa Khan in 1306 who could stand against Indian rulers; the able rule of Alauddin, who himself was a war-lord, withstanding the Mongols (p. 97-99).

The chapter on Indian campaigns, along with presenting historical sketch of military invasions of the Mongols into the subcontinent, is interesting by the mere fact of its inclusion in the structure of the book. In fact, by placing the history of India (at least the part relating to the Mongols) in general canvas of the Mongol Empire and Central Asian’s history (and vice versa), the author avoids the established stereotype of the Mongol Empire developing mainly along the lines of East-West interactions only. The so-called north-south corridor did exist within the Empire (as well as in the Eurasian history), though not being so profoundly highlighted. The same could also be referred to the trade communications, particularly along the famous Great Silk Route. It seems then logical that Gulati paid special attention to this problem in chapter 6 discussing in detail the commercial network within the Mongol Empire.

The chapters on Indian campaigns and commercial network are crucial to our understanding of the body and

mechanism of functioning the Empire (in spite of the fact that only some parts of the Indian subcontinent, notably the north-western, and only sporadically and some of them rather nominally, were related to the Mongol Empire). The Indian campaigns showed us both the far extension and limits of the Mongols in acquiring new territories through military and political tools. At the same time the commercial network is a bright sample of the expansion made through purely economic measures, i.e. trade.

It is worth stressing here that the Great Silk Route could not be referred to the horizontal East-West links only. Rather it had various branches, arteries stretching geographically through all directions, including so called southern one, to the Indian subcontinent. The whole concept of Silk Route was a bright manifestation of the "globalized" world of that time, united under the Mongols, who with the force of their nomadic spirit supported by arms, were able to link and tighten the space of Asia and Europe to the maximum extent possible at that time. Within this space constructed by them the trade became one of the prominent and vital mechanisms of linking these vast territories, thus maintaining the whole premise of the Empire rather steadily. The arteries of numerous branches of Silk Route transpierced the landscape of Eurasia and made it colourful and vivid. While military campaigns of the Mongols were the way of expanding (externalizing) their power, then trade and commerce could be considered as tools of its intensifying and maintaining (or internalizing). From this perspective it was not surprising that the Mongols regarded trade as delete extremely important for their well-being and stability and consequently, developed a favorable attitude towards commerce and merchants. On the other hand, the specific of Mongol Empire based on military campaigns dictated thoroughly elaborated system of road links, stops, "guest houses" where couriers could freely convey messages from distant parts of Empire and change their horses. With this aim they advanced a highly developed system of postal service (*yam*) "to facilitate the travelers, the couriers and public officers on their journeys. The horses, carriages and food were supplied by the inhabitants and the safety on the roads was provided by strict police regulations..." (p. 107). Through this very specific nature of the Mongol Empire with its highly developed road communication, the trade got immense boost to revitalize anew the old Silk Route. As Gulati mentions, "the traders had to seek their permission before entering into their vast empire. On the other hand, it was the duty of the Mongols to provide them the safe conduct and protection on their journeys with goods and caravans" (p. 106).

The flourishing of the trade under the Mongols, witnessed by numerous accounts of travelers, missionaries and merchants, overcomes the stereotype of the Mongols as exclusively barbarians and destroyers of the civilized world. Of course, military campaigns of the Mongols could be characterized as a radical and rather "revolutionary" approach towards "the other" and was inevitably connected with the demolition of those who didn't want to surrender peacefully and who preferred struggle. However, the other rather untold part of the history of the Empire was inevitably linked with the processes of adjustment, i.e. governance and management. In this case the Mongols followed the same pattern as many other political entities of the world – having got resources to power and dominance, they were keen on developing and preserving mechanisms for its maintaining.

Gulati gives rather substantial account of the trade under the Mongols, basing his arguments on the evidences of Arabic, Persian, Syrian, European travelers and merchants, like ibn-Batuta, Ata Malik Juvaini, Rashiduddin Fazlullah, Marco Polo, Plano Carpini, G. Rubruck, etc. However, this description refers mainly to the so called horizontal East-West links, while the South Asian routes remain uncovered by the author. It could be beneficial for readers to trace these contacts, especially bearing in mind the preliminary standpoint of the author on linking the Mongol Empire' Central Asia with the contiguous space of India. Meanwhile, it was these routes in the southern direction which made possible to maintain for many centuries the multi-faceted links between two regions (Central Asia and India), notably in trade and religious fields.

Along with trade, the religious issue was also the one which echoed that time of cultural and religious cross contacts and made the Mongol Empire rather unique and very specific. Unfortunately, Gulati doesn't reflect much on this issue and only briefly mentions the attitude of some Mongol rulers towards religion. However, this issue is very important for our understanding the nature of religion in different cultural milieus, especially when it comes to the Mongols themselves due to their shamanism-based religious identity that was tolerant and welcomed all new beliefs. As was mentioned above, cultural patterns of the Mongols became variably transformed in different cultural milieus, be it Chinese or Persian. Religion too as a substantive and crucial part of culture (understood in a broad sense) underwent these changes, acquiring new characteristics or being changed. This was reflected in the destiny of the Mongol rulers themselves in different parts of the known world. As Gulati rightly mentions, "The Mongol dynasty in China

ruled barely a hundred years, but within that time the Mongols, who had followed their rulers in the eastern conquests had given up the heathenism of their native land and had become Buddhists. In Western Persia and in the countries round about Persia, the Mongols had become Muslims..." (p. 47).

It is worth mentioning here that for the Mongols the concept of religious beliefs was rather diluted but remained tolerant and open to the "other". That's why while adopting Christianity (Nestorian), they still remain half-shamanists (what was witnessed by Rubruck depicting Mongu Great Khan). Or being Christian, the mother of Great Khans Mongu and Qubilai, "she would bestow alms and presents upon *imams* and *sheikhs* and strove also to revive the sacred observances of the faith of Muhammad. And the token and proof of this statement is that she gave 1000 silver *balish* that a college (madrassa) might be built in Bokhara..." (as Gulati cites Juvaini's account, p. 127).

It could be summarized here that the history of Central Asia under the Mongols should not be analyzed through the prism of ferocious invasions only. Rather it had multi-faceted character reflecting the powerful interlinks between cultures, religions, regions. The attempt made by Gulati gives a good background for understanding these processes. The issues raised in the book could enlarge our scope on the role the Mongols played in the history in general, and in Central Asia in particular. For readers it would prove useful to comprehend the history of different regions, like Central Asia and India, not as a distorted but as interconnected with each other.

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Gangeya Mukherji, *An Alternative Idea of India: Tagore and Vivekananda*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2011, pp. 240, Rs. 695.

The challenge of Gangeya Mukherji's erudite book resides, in a way, in its title, *An Alternative Idea of India: Tagore and Vivekananda*. 'Alternative' to what, or to whom? The 'idea of India' is a hugely contested notion of which one wise exponent has been Sunil Khilnani who said, in a book of that name, published in India's 50th year celebrations: 'The democratic idea has penetrated the Indian political imagination and has begun to corrode the authority of the social order and of a paternalist state. Democracy as a manner of seeing and acting upon the world is changing the relation of Indians to themselves.' The 'idea of India' constructed early in the imagination

of Europe is usefully recalled by Mukherji through Alex Aronson's *Europe looks at India* (1946) which takes us back to Voltaire and Abbe Dubois, and tracks opinions for the next many decades. India's own articulation of identity comes with the nationalist discourse, about which Ashis Nandy and others have written magnificently. It would appear that the 'idea' was an imaginative construct linked to the contemporary conditions and intellectual climate surrounding the authors, the architects of the 'idea,' that subsequently served as a beacon to chart the chronology of dominant political discourse.

Mukherji's exposition is a timely reminder of this long process. Both Tagore and Vivekananda, who belong to pre-independence India, have been subjected to voluminous commentary. It is their present relevance to the emergence of a modern, global India that the reader would seek in a book published recently. The title, however, may compel one to ask if these two thinkers were 'alternate' to each other, or jointly offered an oppositional view to a prevailing ideology. The book, thoughtfully and painstakingly answers all these questions. The style is ponderous but deeply engaging, the research is most impressive, and if one is patient with the gradually evolving argument, the rewards are substantial. It is a book that should appear on every library shelf, and be discussed, especially among young and 'global' Indians.

What are the compelling issues? Rabindranath Tagore was born merely two years before Vivekananda but lived much longer than him, and consequently, witnessed the emerging debates on Nationalism. Conventional academia has assumed that Tagore and Vivekananda were mutually antagonistic, specially on the interpretation of godhead and religion. Countering this, Mukherji binds them astutely to the common thread of *sadhana*: "They engaged with deeper human themes that serve as the bedrock for ideas not merely of resistance, but of understanding of the human possibility, an understanding that proceeds to a heightened awareness of insensitivity and exploitation of all kinds and to a commitment to a more compassionate and harmonious world order" (203). This citation is from the last chapter of the book, which I think should have been moved editorially to the beginning. It is here that Mukherji stakes his claim that the two thinkers spoke up against divisive Nationalism, that 'they were not doctrinaire' (205) nor overtly 'political', yet they were breaking through the 'paradigm of violence' (217). This is crucial and apt. Tagore returned his Knighthood in protest against the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre; Vivekananda in the Chicago address called for 'the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all

persecutions with the sword or with the pen.' The book's importance lies in its assertion that Tagore and Vivekananda looked beyond sectarian divides to a humanitarian image of India: 'Theirs is not an Islamic or a Hindu, an Asian or a western identity' (219).

The book, unfortunately, begins not with these valuable observations but with a treatise on 'The National, the Regional, and the Universal.' The paraphernalia of academic research is shown to its fullest. Even as one applauds and learns, the writer's delay in reaching the avowed subject is disturbing. I am not sure that readers need to be told that 'broadly defined nationalism is the assumption of identity by a group of people...' (3), or taken through the tracts of Napoleon, Goethe, Milton, Dostoevsky, Coleridge and many others, as a lengthy preface to the 'Indian Renaissance'. The 'four voices,' Rammohan Roy, Dayananda, Jotirao Phule and Pandita Ramabai, aptly cited by Mukherji, would have been ample for detailing the context.

The chapter 'Tagore in the context of Postcolonialism' is a brilliant exposition on the culture of resistance and the rhetoric of political imagination. Rabindranath who grew up in a multilingual and cross-cultural environment had to sift through a complex matrix to arrive at his amazing innovations in poetry, music, theatre, fiction and art. His roots in the Brahmo Samaj led to the possibility of East-West amalgamations. Tagore brought a new aesthetics, a balance, and a dazzling creativity into his idea of India. Mukherji's section called 'Tagore as Trenchant Social Critic' appeals enormously, perhaps because of my own leanings. He says, 'Tagore's position on the role of women is located within his overall vision of the development of history.' Further, 'Tagore did not support aggression on the part of the proponents of women's rights, perhaps because he did not support any kind of violent assertion (81).' It is true that Tagore's interest in the feminine is a part of his idea of the civilisational process and the humanistic impulses that must guide it. These ideals transcend all castes and creeds. Mukherji's endorsement of Gurudev's stance, a 'non acceptance of extremes' carries passion and conviction. In conclusion Mukherji says, 'Tagore's alternative idea of India detailed in *The Call of Truth* subverts the prevalent idea of nation and identity' (97). This leads to a scintillating discussion of Tagore and Gandhi's relationship.

The next long essay is titled 'Vivekananda: Man-Making and Universal Toleration'. Though it is not quite the same virtuoso performance as the chapter on Tagore, the material is impressive. The idea of the '*Math*' (monastery) with its socio-religious implications is to be

analysed. Muslim boys were welcomed into the institution but could they take *diksha*? Could secular principles be inculcated within Vedantism? Vivekananda debated many such problems. In the section called 'Religion and Social Reform', Mukherji says, 'Vivekananda sought to usher in new thinking and feeling by educating the people. The diction, rhythm and syntax of his prose vibrate with the passion of his engagement against exploitation and injustice, and with the pain of compassion' (182). This is well said. Moreover, Vivekananda was a strong critic of orthodox brahminism as well as any anglicisation of India. He rebuked western commentaries as a 'railway view of India' and spoke against the people who renounced their Indian heritage. One of the famous controversies centred on Pandita Rambai who had converted to Christianity and had also alleged that the state of Hindu women was pathetic. Vivekananda argued that the Vedantic view on women was far from derogatory; the pathetic condition was to be blamed upon society, not heritage. With regard to this controversy, feminist scholars have tended to see Vivekananda as subscribing to a patriarchal belief. However, Gangeya Mukherji goes fairly deep into the history and places Vivekananda in far better light showing how his overall sympathies were with women and that he saw man and woman as equal partners, not as one subordinate to the other.

In summary, Gangeya Mukherji's book uses postcolonialism rather attractively to look over the colonial past and extend to a global future. The larger goal for Tagore as well as Vivekananda was to integrate the underprivileged into the emerging fabric of the nation. Tagore devised ways of balancing the western and the Indian paradigms he respected. Vivekananda delved into Vedantic practices but pushed out the caste interpolations to create a democratic framework. Mukherji concludes, 'Tagore and Vivekananda believed in a greater and subtler reality that transcends violence...pain of oppression, like any other pain, should not serve only to dull the sufferers into insensitivity and parochialism; rather, it serves its purpose by creating awareness of the futility of violence' (218).

As we tuck ourselves nightly, watching television coverage of terrorist acts and listening to the political rhetoric about counter-terrorism, we might recall the two seers whose 'alternate' view spoke against violence and reminded humans to be humane.

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Aravind Adiga, *The Last Man in Tower*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011, pp. 432, Rs.699

Aravind Adiga remains majorly recognized for his Booker prize winning novel *The White Tiger* which dealt with the story of a downtrodden but extremely dedicated servant who works to extremes for the sake of his masters. His next work *Between the Assassinations*, a collection of short stories set in a fictitious South Indian town, focused on the issues of poverty and corruption. Both the works, competently exhibit Adiga's skilful use of language with its nuances and his familiarity with his surroundings.

The Last Man in Tower starts with a methodical organized detailing laying a "pucca" foundation for the readers. Written in luxuriant words the work befits the genre of fiction. The novel retains the dynamism and finesse of the earlier works. The locale is the Vishram society comprising of Tower A and Tower B, typical Mumbai blocks, which are in a state of depletion. Years of neglect and monsoon lashings would make them collapse any moment. Once pink, the Tower A is now "rainwater stained, fungus-licked grey". In the ensemble of middle class people, unprincipled gatekeeper, Marxist social worker, a precarious internet café owner and a religious but crooked secretary make the community of this society. Also we are familiarized with Mumbai's Versova Beach where rich of the city like bankers and film people jog along homeless and the poor releasing them in open; decaying slums, opulent high rising buildings, venerable temples and typical Mumbai streets jammed with variegated inhabitants. In fact, the author poignantly pictures the contrast between wealth and squalor.

In the gallery of different characters, besides 'Masterji' or 'the last man,' the protagonist, there are more than twenty residents, some more memorable than others-committed social worker Georgina Rego, the insecure internet café proprietor Ibrahim Kudwa, cleaner Mary and strange secretary Ashvin Kuthani. Masterji alias Yogesh Murthy, an unyielding and unbending retired teacher and widower opposes the bait of extravagant money given to the residents to vacate the Tower so that luxury apartments could be constructed. This cash is offered by the villainous property dealer and developer Dharman Shah through his sinuous left hand man Shanmugham. Shah had arrived in Mumbai with ten rupees and his theatrical and remarkable rise has come with a cost. "Like a lizard I went up walls that were not mine to go up." Shah's career as a builder has undermined his respiratory system and made him a chronic bronchitis patient. His health suffers but he has an indomitable drive to work more to earn more. Even his personal life is in a

mess. He knows that his mistress, Rosie, an aspiring Bollywood actress, is with him only because of his attractive financial position. His son, Satish, gets entangled with police but Shah does not have moral strength to restrain him from the wrong path.

On the other hand, 'Master ji' values civility, decency, community living, sharing, and cherishes the memories of his wife above monetary gain. However, unlike Masterji the other residents fall into the trap one by one. The money offered to both the Towers – A and B has similar yet delaying response. The residents are initially skeptical of their luck. Unable to comprehend the situation properly they discuss the offer before finally yielding to temptation for a brighter and more secure future. Their typical middle-class mindset surrenders to the bait of being upper class - living in a posh locality. Tower B filled with young executives is easier to break while Tower A seems to be a difficult task. Nevertheless, Shah is cunning enough to look for personal histories of Tower A and negotiate them. Master ji's opposition to the rebuilding of the Tower somehow represents nihilism, probably his disinterest not only in life but also indifference towards others needs, not a virtuous principle. He is obstinate just for the sake of being resistant, defiant and challenging. He is someone beyond material needs but also someone oblivious of other's want of material possessions. This presents him to be indifferent and unsympathetic towards his fellow residents or community. His position and disposition raise certain pertinent questions - is Mrs. Puri wrong in desiring better surroundings for her 18 years old son Ramu, a victim of Down's Syndrome? Is it too much of desire if secretary Kothari could see flamingos so that "all the wasted decades in between fell away"? Should the eccentricity of one man dissolve and crush the needs and desires of the rest? Still, on the ethical grounds, with Master Ji's stand, Adiga also questions the requisite and relevance of gentrification and the drive for slum clearance.

The novel though reads as unpredictably predictable -the reader guesses the end, however, wonders how that finish would close- becomes intense towards the last fifty pages. It becomes dark as the story of dishonesty, betrayal and corruption and greed which breed in an otherwise well knit community unfolds. Intimate friendships and relationships turn out to be not what they seem; these are built on petty resentments and take a brutal inhuman shape. (Neighbours take matters in their own hands). Nonetheless, Masterji evokes our sympathy even as the once harmonious living falls into bits. The incidents which began with gossip and eavesdropping take malicious turns and turn violent as all start treating

Master ji with scorn, contempt and viciousness. The narrative grows dense as the reader wonders whether Masterji would triumph or succumb to the pressures of circumstances. The murder turned suicide of Masterji by his own community leads to shock and yet an acceptance of the murderers.

Adiga has managed, as in his earlier works, to reveal and expose the corruption and violence bred in societies because of the overwhelming capitalist and consumerist culture. The human greed which becomes insatiable leads to the violence of the extreme – murder. Nothing evokes the dormant humanity of the people. Life goes on and the societies and people move on. The book raises several moral and ethical questions and interrogates the values prevalent in the contemporary Indian society.

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Vihang A. Naik, *Poetry Manifesto (New & Selected Poems)*, New Delhi: Indialog, 2010, pp. 72, Rs. 80 (HB).

Indian poetry in English is a threatened genre. It seems to have fallen into bad days over the last decade or two. Nissim Ezekiel is dead, so are Kamala Das, Ramanujan, Dom Moraes and several other talented poets. True, there is still some good poetry that is published occasionally. Keki Daruwalla continues to write and so do a few young poets like Arundhathi Subramaniam, Meena Kandaswamy and others, but on the whole, the picture is not very optimistic with the over-enthusiastic spirit of cultural nativism that has been sweeping the country of late. While poetry in regional languages seems to thrive, that written in English seems to be languishing. We seem to forget that English too is now an Indian language, which is why it is essential to encourage writers who attempt to write their verses in English.

Vihang Naik is a poet from Gujarat who has gained a fair amount of recognition in his home state as a poet and translator. Along with poetry in Gujarati, he has also penned some verse in English and the collection under review brings together several of his old poems along with some new additions. There is no denying that Naik's is a perceptive, poetic appreciation of the world: the sensitivity, the intuitive grasp of emotion, the near-concrete imagery and the manner in which he grasps a finite moment and freezes it in verse – all this is worthy of admiration. This is what a reader expects from a poet. Naik's work evidently merits a closer look.

This is a collection of 72 poems. Apparently only the

first 28 poems are new while the rest are recycled. There are some exceptionally good poems among the old ones, for instance, when the poet speaks of "Dead poets" in his "A Disturbed Sleep":

"Dead poets
haunt your dreams
and disturb your sleep.

You wake up,
startled
as in a battlefield
fighting the airy nothing.

Last night,
you remember,
the mosquito fight
you could not win." (48)

There is a subtle humour in this poem, the element of surprise that bears testimony to the author's intelligent approach to poetry.

Speaking of dead poets, it is interesting to note that the dedication of the collection is to "Nissim Ezekiel / A.K. Ramanujan / Dom Moraes / Arun Kolatkar / Dilip Chitre" all of them dead poets who have probably been an inspiration to Naik. Walking in their footsteps, perhaps Naik aspires to reach the same heights of fame, a legitimate enough ambition for an upcoming poet. It is reminiscent of a similar thought expressed by Dante in his *Divine Comedy* where he imagines himself in the company of great minds of the past: Horace, Juvenal, Virgil, Homer and Ovid. Dante, as we know, succeeded in fulfilling his ambition and is now listed among the greats; let us hope that Naik's dreams, too, are realized.

This reviewer, however, has a few doubts about the poetry. In the first place, the title of the anthology, "Poetry Manifesto," sounds presumptuous. It would be accepted had it come from an established writer of international acclaim but from one who is little known on the Indian literary scene, it smacks of arrogance, as though the poet is laying down rules that should govern poetry. A little more modesty is called for.

Another point relates to the language of the poetry. One is familiar with the term "poetic license" but poetic license does not mean incorrect grammar. True, the reader expects some manipulation of syntax and word play but when one comes across a phrase like "Now/ since hundred years" or a "slut searching / the father of her children", it is a bit difficult to swallow the faulty grammar. There are several such examples.

Turning now to some specific poems for their 'poetic'

