

## Book Reviews

Satya Brata Das, *The Promise of Time: Towards a Phenomenology of Promise*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2011, Pp. xix + 419, ₹ 695.

As I write this review—in June 2012, in Kolkata, a very strange feature film about rehabilitation of displaced ghosts is making big news. The title of this movie *Bhooter Bhabishyat* also intends to convey the deeper problem about the Future of the Past. But not only is the future of our historical past, our bygone cultures and traditions at risk now, the future of our future seems to be at risk too. The short-sightedness and hopelessness of the new cyber-space-occupying face-book generation sometimes seems to create a false nihilism about civilization's future itself.

In the last part of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant lists the questions that human reason feels compelled to answer, and to address which Kant wrote his three famous Critiques:

- What can I know?
- What ought I to do?
- What may I hope?

The “I” of these most basic self-questionings of reason, of course, turns out to be a disguised “we”, when, Kant starts his *Logic* lectures with all these questions plus a fourth one, in which, according to this undisputed father of both analytic and continental, modern and post-modern philosophies, all the other critical questions converge: What is Man?

Even after finding out the limits of knowledge, and being “disciplined” by a humbling critique which tells us that reality viewed from nowhere, just as it is in itself, is something we can merely *think*—and indeed must think-about, but can never *know*, human reason legislates rules of moral action to itself and celebrates its autonomy as its own law-giver.

But, however desireless—*niṣkāma*—our moral actions

may be, however unconcerned with the fruits of one's actions the ideal ethical agent may be, we humans are not just conceptually experience-organizing knowledge-seekers, and categorically duty-bound practical reasoners, we also live because we hope.

Time, as a form of intuition, and the time-images of pure categories, as *schemata*, determine the nature of our cognitive engagement with a world partly “made” and partly “received” by our understanding. One does not have to be a popular San Francisco-based feel-good guru to realize that each of us, every moment, physically live only in the present, that this time now is the luckiest gift, the present which is a present, that we receive every instant of our brief dwelling in this world which, our current experience always tells us, spreads back into the past, and forward into the future. Our inescapable command over the concept of the past comes from the frame of memory and recognition with which we are conditioned to catch the present sensations and perceptions. I cannot even see a tree without recognizing that I have seen something of its kind before (how does one see any *kind* of thing for the very first time at all? Hence the Platonic and Indian Karma theoretic a priori argument: that every life and experience is beginninglessly preceded by past lives and past exposures to the world. More interestingly, even if one does not grope into memory to classify or characterize the object, one at least gets the feeling that the existence of the thing one is seeing predates one's seeing of it: that it did not pop into existence thanks to one's seeing of it. In these two ways, the concept of the past—that the world did not begin just now—is ingrained in our cognitive mechanism. Yet, while through the burdensome blessing of memory we look back at the past whenever we look at the objective world, in our practical life—as doers—we are constantly living for, towards, even, in one deep sense, off of the future.

A voluntary action starts with a *promise* to myself “I shall do this” with or without a “because..” of reason. Now, I cannot intend to do something in the past or the

present. I cannot promise to have done something. Not in the past because we cannot go back there, except in mad science fiction or in morbid repentance. Not in the present, because if I am already doing this I cannot want to do it (I can only want to re-do it, but redoing is not doing). So voluntary action is planned, intended, and accomplished in the future. Yet actions are not completed—you can try to cook by merely fumbling with the rice and water and fire but you have not cooked until the softened edible fragrant white exuberance is ready. About this future fruit of the action, all we can do is *hope*. Our hopes are to be distinguished from our mere wishes—for wishes can be about the past also e.g. I wish I were born at the time of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa—but hope can only be about the future. Our hopes are also not forecasts or predictions. I cannot *hope* that there will be a global genocidal 2025 even if I am forced to predict that. Hope goes beyond inductive probability and claims of ‘deserving’. Kant calls hopes “moral certainties”. Rabindranath Tagore, tormented by this dark sorry world, just as much as young Siddhartha or a cynical Schopenhauer was, still sings with “hope against hope”, addressing God:

If you will not bring me back to life,  
Why would you kill me?  
What for is all this arrangement with such festive  
claptrap?  
Look at how brutally you have cracked open my breast.  
And now, if no fountain gushes out of it, how would  
that make sense?

One does not have to be a theist in order to hope, just as one does not have to be a believer in order to be grateful for a day-break with the most incredibly musical bird-calls. The scientific uncertainty of the assurance that all the incongruences of life and nature will come together in a unified theory, the constantly eroding but never-vanishing faith that the huge amount of unmerited anguish in the world will one day reveal a concealed justification, and the hope for a future “redemption” or “resolution” all seem to be a *hope* that keeps us going. Is “hope” then, the *Isha*, the Lord which pervades, permeates, perfumes and covers all fragile moving things in this changing world (*ishaa vaasyam idam sarvam yat kinca jagatyaam jagat..*)?

The unusually ruminative book titled: *The Promise of Time: Towards a Phenomenology of Promise* does not even hint at any theodicy or any resolution-directed nature of our living in time and free will. But, right from the otherwise unimportant “Acknowledgement” section—which starts with an intricately sensitive analysis of

“thankfulness”, Satya Brata Das’s densely written, nearly 400 page book dwells on what and why we must hope for if our life is a wait for a future which never arrives.

Its twenty-one chapters are, somewhat arbitrarily, divided into five parts called:

“Prologue”, “Configuration”, “The Lightning Flash”, “Event”, “Messianicity” and finally, “On Philosophy”. Unfortunately, there is no clear thesis which is the author’s own, towards which the argument of the chapters builds up, though nearly every paragraph is bursting with tantalizing, half-articulated insights.

Even if one can extract a series of theses that Das has put forward, this is not a book in philosophy, because it does not contain a single argument for any thesis. It almost flaunts its refusal to pass from plausible premises to unobvious conclusions. Perhaps it is not meant as a book in philosophy in the sense in which both continental and analytic philosophers write philosophy. Even Sartre or Levinas gives justifications for their openly un-analytic reflections and pronouncements on the distinction between, say, being-in-itself and being-for-itself, or for the infinite ethical claims of the Face of the Other.

Satya Brata Das’s book, while being an unabashed, albeit original, commentary on Schelling, Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Blanchot, Levinas and Derrida, does not even make the feeblest attempt at justifying even his interpretations of these giants. On page 181, for example, Das claims that to speak is to be attuned to a fundamental mournfulness. But why? Of course, we know that there are intriguing symbolic puzzles such as the jester/clown’s drop of tear, but surely there are unambiguously jolly, happy, fun-filled ways of speaking which are not mournful! When Hannah Arendt urges us to celebrate natality, or a Bhajan celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna or baby Muhammad (recall that unforgettable Qawaali “Dai Halima god me teri chaand utarne walla hai!!”), must we search out a lament, a dirge, a mourning in that celebration of life?

How would Das’s own hopeful discourse about the Messiah to come count as evidence to this universal mournfulness of speech?

There is no point embarrassing the author with quotable examples of the numerous ungrammatical sentences, and simple infelicity of run-on sentences that even long-winded writers like Kant or Heidegger would be ashamed of.

But I would like to end this critical notice by registering my mournful reaction that the complete lack of allusion to the metaphysics of time and the politics of the future in Indian (Sanskrit or Vernacular, classical or contemporary) philosophy makes this book sadly derivative and Eurocentric. It is quite readable and

thought-provoking. And the style of Satya Brata's thinking holds a lot of "promise". If only he could think through the lens of his own tradition and his own lived reality, of post-colonial India! A book on Time would be more timely if it told us of the Space that the author authentically lives in. But I am hopeful. I have learned from this book that to think is to thank. Seriously, that is a very fertile teaser of an insight. One has to be thankful for that.

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Lakshmi Kannan, *Nandanvan & Other Stories*, Translated from the original Tamil by the author, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011, Pp. 280 +x, ₹ 325.

One of the joys of reading short stories in a collection is that one can linger on each story without feeling compelled to go forward, anxiously clutching the threads of the narrative. Lakshmi Kanan's collection of short stories has the similar quality of making the reader ruminates and sense the resonance as each of the stories in some way or the other connects with the life experiences of the reader. Whether, it be the everyday struggle with the mundane and tyranny of a workplace in the "Zeroing In" and "The Maze" or transacting internally with world of emotions while swinging between life and death in "Please, Dear God" and "A Sky All Around", grappling with loneliness and filial indifference in old age in "Nandanvan" and "Savvyasachi Square" and finally, negotiating with patriarchy that forms the dominant theme in this collection, these stories immediately forge a relationship with the readers giving them an easy access into the inner world of the text.

The anthology is divided into three parts. The first part is a detailed analysis of Lakshmi Kanan's literary style and her stories by C.T. Indra, followed by two sets of interviews with the author by Christine Gomez and Sudha Rai respectively, giving a useful insight into the worldview and the literary style of the author. The second part comprises sixteen short stories followed by a novella in the third part. Originally written in Tamil and translated into English by the author herself, most of the stories despite being situated within the South Indian context, have a universal appeal with an eclectic literary style that transcends all regional and linguistic boundaries. In fact, one of the merits of this collection lies in the ways in which the author has negotiated not only with the bilinguality of the text, but has also deftly transposed the cultural traditions. This is a mark of an

excellent translation where the culture and the language that expresses it, blend effortlessly, transporting the reader to the world of the narrative. While replying to the question posed by Sudha Rai, Lakshmi Kanan aptly stated, "The mediations I negotiate are mostly in the use of language as I am anxious that the translation should read well... that it has to flow without disturbing the laws of English grammar, syntax... The real challenge is in translating the dialogue and grasping the speech rhythms of a people" (31).

One of the striking qualities of the stories is the complex treatment of the themes. This is best articulated in the narratives on gender with multiple voices creating a whirlwind of tensions and conflicts accentuating the intensity of these short stories. Thus we are confronted with a situation in which feminism is not a simplistic linear idea. Rather it is a complex discourse woven with the broader frames of religious orthodoxies, class structure, postcolonial identities, women's compliance with the patriarchy and most significantly their quiet subversion and negotiation instead of outright rejection. For instance, "Ejamanaaar" (meaning husband in Kannada) is one such story in which the protagonist, Gowri, an old lady operates within the traditional patriarchal family controlling the financial as well as household matters with the husband usually occupying the interior portion of the house, probably symbolic of his withdrawal from the practical life. Gowri's position of authority is further enhanced in her portrayal as the confidante of the neighbourhood and the silent yet palpable chemistry that she shares with one of the relatives, Sambasivan indicates a certain sexual autonomy that Gowri quietly enjoys. There is a pun in the term *ejamanaaar* as the tone of the narrative points out that the actual *ejamanaaar*, which also implies a manager, is Gowri. In many ways, the tradition dominated by power and hierarchy between the husband and wife here is reduced to an empty symbol, mocked at by none other than Gowri herself when she says, "... there is a world beyond this very imperfect character called an 'ejamanaar'Ö" (63). In contrast to this are the outright rejection of the oppressive traditions and a firm denunciation of the patriarchal structure in "Muniyakka" and "Because... ." However, this denunciation is accompanied by adherence to the same traditions generating a tension that creates several layers of negotiation. Such a nuanced approach is adopted in "Nagapushpam" in which the constant struggle between the mother and her questioning daughter is resolved by the author herself in her insightful commentary on women as lynchpin of the traditions, carrying the burden of meticulous adherence to them.

Interestingly, in these stories the class differences are

the basis of the attitudinal differences too. The characters belonging to the middle class are usually reticent in challenging the traditions. The questioning and the tentativeness of the protest are mediated in most of the stories through the character of the girl child belonging to the middle class background. On the other hand, this conservative middle class attitude is countered by strident opposition of the women belonging to the marginalized sections of the society as reflected in the two stories, in which the female rebels have the same name, Muniyakka. The mythological tropes are used by the author to underscore some startling analogies between the sufferings of women situated in different time and space. The disconcerting questions asked by the girl child in "Because..." not only represent an alternate reading of the *Ramayana*, they also attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the tradition endorsed by the epic, creating a tumult in the comfort zone of the cherished conventions. Even the modern ideals are not spared. The discourse of feminism is questioned in "Simone de Beauvoir And The Mane". Beauvoir with her writings as an iconic feminist is deconstructed in the story by juxtaposing her unconventional personal relationship with Jean Paul Sartre with that of the contemporary urban educated Indian woman who feels stifled by the modern man's expectations of her as an intellectual embodiment of Beauvoir and her unconventionality on one hand, but a submissive partner on the other. Through the protagonist, the writer highlights this dilemma in the feminist legacy of Beauvoir that also tries to grapple with the mismatch in Beauvoir's unflinching devotion to Sartre despite his infidelity in a truly conventional mould with her avant-garde writings, like *The Second Sex* that have been the inspiration of the feminist movements. Ultimately, the modern Indian woman charts her own feminist trajectory in "Simone de Beauvoir And The Mane," the recurrence of which we find in the novella, *Another Hour, Another Hue*. Interestingly, the feminine of the word *novello*, this novella deals with the sexual politics that working women confront in their workplaces, especially in an intellectually liberated university environment, where gender hierarchies are supposed to be minimal. In fact, the duplicity of the modern man is highlighted, who on one hand wants a modern woman and on the other hand, resents her self confidence and independence. Whether it is in "Just Think About It", "Maria" or "Another Hour, Another Hue," the narratives expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal behaviour that is recast in the modern assertion of the traditional sexual power and sexist attitudes. The bruised male ego in "Just Think About It," in which the man is unable to take the rejection by his wife, ignoring his own instrumentality

in it, the insensitivity of the male attitude that mocks at female homosexuality while glorifying the male homosexual behaviour in "Maria" and the oppressive sexual assertion of a superior who manipulates the careers of his women co-workers reducing them to helplessness, though not for very long in "Another Hour, Another Hue" tell us that gender equality in our society has a long way to go.

The trials and tribulations of a workplace are brought out sensitively in "The Maze" and "Zeroing In" that highlight the stressful professional situations in which mediocrity manipulates and marginalizes excellence and loyalty is given precedence over merit. The frustrations, helplessness and dejection experienced by the protagonists are easily identifiable by readers irrespective of gender. The documentation of real life experiences into sensitive narratives in the stories point to the existential predicament resulting from continuous oscillation between traditions and modernity. Caught between the two ends, the characters struggle to grapple with the sense of self and preserve their individual identities, something that dominates the real life experiences. The stories dealing with life and death are surrealistic giving an even pace to the narratives making a reader to introspect about the questions of life.

Clearly there is a distinct literary style within which the stories are grounded that makes Kanan a part of the distinctive genre of postcolonial Indian writers. Theorizing this style of Indian writers, especially of those who write in English as well as other regional languages, becomes important. Bracketing Kanan's works as 'Gothic' or 'Marxist' as analysed by C.T. Indra and Christine Gomez in the first part limits the spirit of the text, imposing categories that may not be inappropriate.

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Rajee Seth, *Not Without Reason and Other Stories* Trans. Raji Narsimhan, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, Pp.119, ₹ 210.

This collection of short stories entitled *Not Without Reason and Other Stories* comprises of nine stories by well known Hindi writer Rajee Seth translated into English by none other than Raji Narsimhan whose English translation of Maitreyi Pushpa's Hindi novel *Alma Kabutari* was shortlisted for the Crossword Translation award in 2006-7. As the translator has aptly remarked in the Introduction to this collection of short stories, that to call Rajee Seth a

feminist writer would not be wrong but it would be a half-truth. Seth's penetrating engagement with the nuanced experiences of emotional and mental agony transcends gender, class and caste specifications as the narrator in the story "Morass" observes: "But it's not the pains and wounds of the body that are the problem, sir. They heal. It's the pains and wounds of the mind that are bigger, unhealing" (108). Such experience of pain as felt by the partition victims in the early as well as late post partition period, is the lot of the humble, docile servant of "Yatra", and the childless, socially stigmatized woman in the title story or the separated woman in "The Same Jungle Again".

For a vast majority of people in the Indian sub-continent, partition, even today is a multi-layered tragedy of immeasurable depth and unspeakable magnitude which has left indelible scars on the victims' psyche. Three stories, - "Meeting", "The Outsiders" and "Wait Intezaar Hussain" are foregrounded in the experience of partition. For the fifty nine year old Roshan of "Wait Intezaar Hussain" the cathartic moment of release occurs after a prolonged interval of forty years, incidentally, on India's Independence Day. The day coincides with his personal freedom in terms of the purgation of emotions. While reading Intezaar Hussain's partition novel *Basti* the protagonist relives and revisits the painful memory of forty years old Lahore riots that subsumed his beloved. Located in the immediate post-partition period that witnessed massive exodus of refugees from both sides of the border, the first story of this collection, "Meeting" unfolds incisively the humiliating pain of a proud and self respecting individual soliciting assistance in the form of some 'work' and not a crateful of charity from the government agency. "I don't want relief. I want work" (3). Despite all sympathy and human understanding it is simply not possible for the non-participants of a tragedy of such magnitude, - the humane Collector Tripathi ('Meeting') and the young sensitive woman ("The Outsiders") for instance, to relate and identify with the victim's location. These two partition stories poignantly problematize the insider-outsider dichotomy and the twofold paradigms of subjecthood and distancing.

This is not to say that Seth is apathetic to feminist issues and concerns. The feminist issues of gender marginalization in a patriarchal dispensation repeatedly surface in the text and sub text of these stories. As a welcome point of departure, the focus is not so much on the glorified depiction of pain as on the crucial moments of feminine self assertion and self actualization. The impotent and manipulative husband in the title story "Not Without Reason" may conveniently transfer the blame and stigma of childlessness to his wife Deepali

subjecting her to unqualified humiliation in the private as well as public domain but finally it is the wife's rising sense of rebellion that imparts a feminist strength to the story. The pivotal point in this story is not the victimization of Deepali as a childless, stigmatized woman but her resistance to the coercive patriarchal authority expressed in her "decision not to come back". Correspondingly, the marginalized location of widowed Amma of "Amma's Gold" dumped into a dingy room by her opportunist son is redeemed to a fairly large extent by the reclamation of her right in the form of her gold bangles which she intends to donate to the Defence Fund in the wake of the Indo-China war. Refusing to oblige her selfish son she 'makes her hand her voice, her tongue'. "A palm stretched thus on an invisible platform of air — motionless, still, a palm demanding the restoration of her rights of ownership" (27).

In the feminist canon, economic empowerment for women has been proclaimed as one of the defining imperatives for empowerment. As a working woman, the unnamed separated wife of "The Same Jungle Again" is located in an empowered centre but economic empowerment is not always the prerequisite for female agency in view of the male whims and fancies in terms of male pride ('Morass') and male superiority complex ('My Option', 'Not Without Reason'). The challenge before Aarti of "Morass" who is as the sole bread-earner of the family after the accident of her egoist husband is not delimited to economic empowerment or the feminist postulates of identity or subjecthood but to the mundane issues, — to keep her family and home going at all costs against all odds. The challenge for the unnamed battered-up and runaway protagonist of "The Same Jungle Again" is far more intriguing and multifold. She has willingly surrendered her rights of motherhood to her sister-in-law for the betterment of her daughter. In this open-ended story her decision to agree to meet her rival and co-victim could be construed as an act of sisterhood.

The "feminist" temper manifest in most of these woman-centered stories is not militant or aggressive but feminine. The feminist fury is not demonstrated in words or actions but kept well within control by the battered and bruised women. The personal is not the political for the home maker Aarti or the mute sufferer of "The Same Jungle Again," the feminist coordinates of identity, subjecthood and agency are not even an issue for them.

One story that cannot be defined by any of the above categories is "Yatra." The pen-portrait of the stereotyped subaltern vis-a-vis his son, the modern subaltern is a subtle comment on the diffusing class boundaries in the nation state. The old servant's decision to finally agree to set up home with his son and thus sever the bonds of

age-old servitude is suggestive of the paradigmatic shift in the centre/margin and maalik-servant/master-slave dyad.

Translation as a theoretical and practical paradigm has attained a new dimension in the present global context in social, economic, cultural and political terms. Translation studies are found to be increasingly useful and beneficial as a means of forming a 'dialogue' and 'communication' not only in linguistic terms but as a viable form of cultural linkage as well. This work is a vindication of this fact. Raji Narasimhan's lucid translation reads like an original text. In fact some of Rajee Seth's Hindi titles - "Akaaran to Nahee" and "Usi Jangal Mei", for instance, sound much better in English translation. Seth's syntactical constructions, specifically her use of prepositions in Hindi are often unconventional and unusual. These linguistic lacunas in the original have been improved upon in the English translation of the book.

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Rana Nayar, *Inter-sections: Essays on Indian Literatures, Translations and Popular Consciousness*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, Pp. xxvii+276, 2012. ISBN 97-881-2504-55-40, ₹ 445.

Rana Nayar's *Inter-sections: Essays on Indian Literatures, Translations and Popular Consciousness* is a timely and welcome addition to the books on contemporary literary and cultural concerns. It validates approaches of literary evaluation in multiple ways as they shape popular consciousness. Nayar deals with history of literary games, traces brief histories of Indian English fiction, drama, Punjabi literature and Theory and Practice of translation. He deals with these obsessions thematically, classifying his essays into the sections 'Reading Indian and Indian English Literatures', 'Punjabi Literature: Some Context and Texts', 'Reading Translation(s)' and 'Power, Hegemony and Mass Media: Case Studies in Popular Consciousness.'

Besides classifying thematically Nayar also analyzes their tonal (irony and anger) and textual (the challenge to the tyranny of discourse and gender and the interrogation of a seemingly natural language system) nuances. If these phrases seem abstract and bland- such abstractions do tend to lose their power through detachment from experience- this is definitely not so of the literature which Nayar goes on to talk about, there is little of the either the insipid or abstract in the works of

fiction, drama, translations or Punjabi literature discussed in *Intersections* because all are potent texts which deal with the complexity of human existence and experience. This is an accomplished resource book for research students and for general readers and even the beginners who are interested in details of bibliography and even individual texts taken up for dialogue. As Nayar points out in the 'Preface', "In its own distinctive way each essay becomes an undeniable act of protest and resistance, a way of articulating and legitimising the discourse of alterity" (xxv). As a matter of fact, it is suggested that 'alterity' intrinsically has in it points of convergence and divergence. *Inter-sections* is a guide which does not assume a close knowledge of the texts since it was thought many would be unfamiliar (especially texts of Punjabi Literature) to a number of readers, this will be the most adequate addition to the shelves of teachers and students of 'interdisciplinary approach to literature'. Nayar's investigation is finely tuned and poised the analysis made are, I think, the main strength of this volume. Directed as they are to the uninformed and initiated reader of contemporary interdisciplinary nature of literary studies, which have now been rechristened as cultural studies too, they are delicately poised between a sensitive critical analysis and the simple task of recounting the story and a rousing the interest of future readers. Nayar achieves advisable balance. Few would dispute his selection of writers, texts and genres. It is particularly pleasing to see his recognition of importance of, 'Rediscovering Humanities in Life and Literature', as an 'Epilogue' to the volume.

The first essay in the each section of the book discusses important issues of the related themes of the respective sections and how the Indian academia perceives it. In the essay "Locating/Dislocating Indian Literatures: A Metacritical Narrative", deconstructs the notions of 'Location' and 'Dislocation' and connects them with postmodernist and postcolonial intercessions, Nayar concludes: 'The location of Indian literatures, as we have seen is an extremely problematic but not entirely unfamiliar territory' (32).

Correspondingly, the essay, "Punjabi Literature through the Prism of History", surveys Punjabi poetry from the twelfth-century to the growth, expansion and progress of fiction and drama in present times. Nayar gives a comprehensive view of Punjabi literature and its history but keeping in view the scope of the essay he deliberately excludes Punjabi prose and criticism as well as writings of Punjabi Diaspora in the west. One of Nayar's fixations as a translator (from Punjabi to English) is the way he outlines the 'theoretical and contextual'

contours of translation. He feels, 'it... cannot be done in an essentialist or universalist manner' (101) He confines his essay "Author as Translator: Paradigms and Possibilities in the Indian Context", to indigenising of Indian theories of translation,' he also trusts that 'translation in India is as old as the history of various Indian languages.' It is also felt that in contemporary times Indian translators are influenced by Western/Eurocentric theories/ideas of translation, which have affected their imagination and sensibility. Nayar is not entirely innocent of it for instance in his essay "Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*: Multiple Historical Perspectives and Literary Art", he in order to prove his stance he concedes to Hayden White's, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, Fernand Braudel's *On History*, Dominick La Capra's *History and Criticism*, Keith Jenkins' *Postmodern History Reader* and Michael Bentley's *Modern Historiography: An Introduction*. Moreover, putting side by side Sahni's *Tamas* with Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* is too exploratory an endeavour. Sahni and Brecht were addressing to entirely different times and contexts and their discernments too were chopped in time and space.

The 'Epilogue' of *Inter-sections* perpetuates a critical juncture in our history because the world we live in is fast changing and the change leaves the people in 'a whirlpool' (262) gasping for breath. As such a critical point in time of history it is time for "Rediscovering Humanities in Life and Literature", according to Nayar, 'crisis in humanities' is the result of both 'external and internal factors'. He believes that in order to overcome such crisis it is inevitable to prefer relativistic approach instead of absolutist one. That is to say 'humanism'(or even liberal humanism) as stipulated in ancient Indian epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in which it occurs as a "normative principle" of philosophical system in contrast to Eurocentric notion of human knowledge and thought or existential philosophical dualism. Therefore, Indian humanism according to Nayar has characteristics like, 'inclusivity, catholicity and comprehensiveness'. He drives home the argument that '*dharma*' or 'the path of righteousness' is the essence of humanism for us in India. Sceptically he questions, 'Are there any solutions to this state of affairs, this absence of *dharma* and the consequent threat to our humanity, our very existence?' (269). He champions insistently that Indian humanism lies in Sufi traditions of Punjabi Sufi poets and others such as Jalal al Din Rumi for they invigorated curiosity in 'dialogic tradition' and 'composite culture'. The present decade has witnessed intense debate on the status of humanities in India and its skirmishes with pure sciences and to an

extent with social sciences. It is felt by academia that the time has come when policy makers in higher education sector sitting in their ivory towers should think on the lines that like the Indian Institutes of Technology across the country we should have Indian Institutes of Humanities where even the pure science can be given space. Nayar adds a new component to look at the understanding of humanism, but it may be true 'generally speaking' but if one has to make critical evaluation one would expect and welcome more sophisticated analysis of the reception of what Nayar terms as 'Indian Humanism' the one which takes into account the more comprehensive view of literatures of India and also development of other prevalent sciences in the society as well as 'marginalising' influence of practitioners of liberal humanities across the country. What is certain- and this is made clear in Nayar's volume- is that range of issues related to literary genres in India is beguiling and exigent, to both the general reader and the academia.

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*Voice and Memory: Indigenous Imagination and Expression*, edited by G.N. Devy, G. V. Davis and K.K. Chakravarty, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011, Pp. xxvi + 341, ₹ 575.

*Voice and Memory* is a volume of papers presented at the Chotro Conference (devoted to languages and literatures, the cultures and histories of the indigenous peoples of the post-colonial world). The Conference was held in Delhi in 2008. The volume consists of 26 papers by scholars from diverse fields, with an introduction by K. K. Chakravarty.

The papers included in the volume deal with various themes which collectively 'provide a critique of the post colonial theory about the indigenous situation from the indigenous point of view' [p.xvi]. The papers show how the indigenes use various mediums ranging from folk poetry, literature and internet to the use of museums and films to voice their views and bring forth various elements of their culture and daily life to the readers. The volume stresses the importance of *emic* over *etic*, something which anthropologists have done over the ages, and this furthers the anthropological perspective to the study and analysis of society or cultural elements from the indigenous perspectives.

The volume begins with a paper that critiques the

postcolonial theory and stresses upon understanding the indigenous struggles. According to the authors the postcolonial theory distorts one's understanding of 'race and racism, disconnecting race from colonialism in a manner that is quite artificial' (26) and does not bring forth the indigenous reality but instead undermines indigenous existence and struggles. The next paper depicts contra acculturative and revivalist attempts among the Urhobo of Niger Delta who use various endangered traditions during death rituals and Christian ceremonies in an attempt to object to the vices of slavery and administrative atrocities.

The loss and shift of indigenous language due to colonialism and dominance of the 'Greater Traditions' and its revitalisation is brought out in three chapters of the book. In this direction, the Irish, Maori, Beta Kurumbar and Rathwa Barela languages have been considered. The authors strongly feel that unless concrete efforts are made to revive and revitalise these indigenous languages by its speakers, not only the languages but also the culture and the world-view embodied by them will be in danger of extinction.

The much neglected patterns of confluence and interpretation taking place in various forms to bring forth the contemporary situation of reconciliation contrary to the idea of there being an unbridgeable gulf between the colonial influences and indigenous ways of life is also brought out in the volume. Schlote speaks of how Zapotec folk songs, Spanish Georgian chant, Hopi and Aztec creation stories have been fused by the Coatlicue theatre to depict Mexican indigenous history while Balogun shows how 'instead of tradition being modernised, modernity is being traditionalised' (79) in the contemporary Yoruba funeral rites where acrobatics and ritual music, negotiations and gifts blend into the catholic mass. Loimeier, similarly brings out how post apartheid South African poetry is merging almost all the local languages and expressions into English (which is the *lingua franca*) and Afrikaans (considered the language of apartheid) to serve as a mirror to contemporary society

The role and effectiveness of literature as a medium of expression to counteract colonialism, to showcase mixed cultural heritage, both indigenous and colonial, and as a means of cross cultural understanding is brought out in chapters 7 and 14. Mercanti's paper which analyses *Kanthapura* and *Fontamara* discusses strategies of resistance using truth, non-violence and social Christianity to counter the dominance of repressive forces while Reif-Huesler's paper analyses three autobiographical texts which 'cover almost all of the twentieth century and lead the reader through the turbulent history of a nation whose cultural and political

goal was to gather together all South African peoples under the umbrella of the "Rainbow Nation"' (110). Reif-Huesler goes on to show how 'reiteration, reinterpretation, and re-evaluation of the past in fiction is suggested as more effective than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for remembering history and redeeming wrongs in South Africa'.

The importance of folklore, folk arts, folksongs and folktales as a source of information cannot be overlooked while attempting to understand the indigenous perceptions or worldview and therefore from the very beginning it has been an inseparable part of Cultural Anthropology. The volume adequately testified the same. Mwanzi in her paper rightly states, 'The critical place of the folk tale in a changing society is based on the assumption that in the folk tale is stored the wisdom of the people, such wisdom as has taken the people through years of storm, tribulations as well as pleasure.' (138) In her paper, Mwanzi examines the role of folk tales in preserving and perpetuating values such as honesty, fair play and kindness in a 'society that is becoming increasingly complex and impervious to values and etiquette' (*ibid*). Keeping the Haida mythical Raven at the centre, Alexander effortlessly brings out the difference between knowledge and wisdom and presents 'wisdom as a concept beyond, yet touching on literary studies, which links the individual with collective and even universal perspectives' (p.162). The chapter goes on to 'instigate an approximation between literature and myth' and brings forth the 'different themes, forms of discussion and modes of thinking and expression that expose some of the limiting habits of the disciplines concerned' (*ibid*).

The paper by Chellaperumal and Vijayraghavan discusses seven of the popular Irular ballades which depict the plight suffered by women of the tribe at various stages and in various forms with the only means of avenging these atrocities by the victim being 'her entry into death either by choice as a matter of honour or by violence' (187). Aikant in his paper further clarifies the importance and role of folk songs while analyzing *jagar* (Garhwali folklore). According to Aikant, the *jagar* not only play the social role in educating and consolidating group identity, but also reflect the prevailing attitudes and institutional practices. Thus, while on one hand the *jagar* tell stories of the pain suffered by women in a mismatched marriage (as she is not consulted on such matters in a strongly patriarchal society), on the other hand it also tells us of the heroic role played by these very women in social movements such as the Chipko movement.

Gender issues continue to be addressed in other chapters of the volume. Fazilleau through her analysis



of the works of Memmi, Nowra and Wright reveals the poignant plight of Australian aboriginal women who have continuously been subjected to severe violence, rape, alcoholism and substance abuse at the hands of both white and aboriginal men. This silent suffering continues from the colonial times till date due to the connivance of the white and aboriginal men who ignore human rights/women rights in a bid to further their personal lust, ego and political ambitions.

The role of women in the national cause and the dilemma of government and civil society in Kenyan post independence which have been dealt with in the indigenous Gikuyu writing of Ngugi are the concern of the paper by McLaren, who opines that 'Portraying women as central to African fiction can help to sustain a necessary gender consciousness' (205). Thomas on the other hand, through his study of the works of two tribal writers, namely Narayan and Janu, spells out some of the differences between post colonialism and eco-centrism while attempting to 'search for grounds that allow a productive overlap between them and define "green postcolonialism"' (224).

Kerry-Jane Wallart discusses Walcott's *Collected Poems* in an attempt to explore the modes of 'spectral tribal identity and to read it as the symptom not of a (post)modern loss of meaning, but much rather of a strategy of superimposition' (235). Like several other indigenous languages, the Carib too is fast disappearing and along with it is dying an entire culture. Walcott, through his poems 'retrieves the Amerindian voice, by collapsing the chasm of signifier and signified, and by using English in a palimpsestual layering of languages' (xviii). The conflict with the 'other' and with the 'other' within 'oneself' is expressed through an examination of Danticat's *Dew Breaker* which is a narration of the henchmen who during the Haitian dictatorship 'arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed fellow Haitians believed to be political opponents or disloyal citizens' (244) thus fracturing the unity of the island and becoming a traitor to the commoners since he is also 'one of them' [*ibid*].

The positive role that a museum can play in helping indigenous cultures survive and grow is brought out through the case study of Vacha, the Museum of Voice, Gujrat where the Ratha Bhill and other tribal groups are made socially aware about the 'richness of their own cultures to generate social interaction' (257). On similar lines, there is a study of the 'Train the Teacher' programme started at the Royal Melbourne University of Technology where non-indigenous teachers/trainers are taught by indigenous community members. This new

approach is aimed at teaching the non indigenous trainers about 'listening to communities, respecting their culture and ways of working' (261) and thus 'challenging the "unconscious colonial voice" within themselves and their workplace' [*ibid*].

The volume provides us a glimpse of the tribal life as depicted in various literary works. While Prakash shows how Mahasweta Devi's novel *Chotti Munda and His Arrow* reveals the image of a non violent tribal, contrary to the stereotype, who raises his arrow only to convert opponents by moderation, negotiation and moral pressure; Jacobs through her analysis of three Malayali novels namely *Mavelimantism*, *Kocharethi* and *Ooralikkudi* attempts to compare and contrast the patterns of tribal life and their sufferings as depicted in these works. Mudgal similarly through her interpretation of Maracle's *Sundogs* while making an effort to 'question certain post colonial assumptions and develop a method of reading native cultural productions' [p. 300] vividly portrays the plight of native Canadians in their resistance against encroachment of their ancestral land and their community's marginalisation.

The use of films as a medium of creating and altering viewpoints and conveying facts is brought out in Gehlawat and Starrs's papers. Thus, while Gahlawat in his paper aims at demonstrating how the Hindi film experience can play an integral role in the process of "reorientation" (315) of the subaltern which is the first step to enlightenment; Starrs shows how de Heer, an Australian film maker, patronises and show cases aboriginal culture as it is 'without dubbing and haunting, dreamtime tales and ballads, stories wrapped in stories, and strident diegetic sounds to reproduce Aboriginal acoustic sensibility and eco spirituality'(xviii) thus, elevating the status of Aboriginal culture and giving it the respect it deserves.

Covering wide range of themes and dealing with the indigenous in every part of the world, the volume clearly indicates towards the revivalist tendency fast developing among the native communities and a growing awareness and acceptance of the alternative theories of development and progress as against the colonial/western view. The book being inter-disciplinary in nature will certainly prove useful to students and scholars interested in researching on the tribal/indigenous communities besides being of interest to the common reader.

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P K Basant, *The City and The Country in Early India: A Study of Malwa*, New Delhi: Primus Books, 2012, Pp. xi +369, ₹ 1150.

A study of urbanization in the Malwa region in 6 BCE based on archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources, the present work accounts for the social processes in the spatial context resulting in urban growth in the region. The aim of the book is to test the generalizations of the second urbanization by focusing on Malwa as a kind of case study, both from the perspective of the structure and the process of urbanization at the level of a spatial segment. It challenges the accepted paradigm of understanding the Indian past from a north Indian perspective. The first part takes up a study of the process of change from a pre urban to an urban one and the second attempts to underline the impact of this process on society and urbanism. A useful review of existing literature at the outset brings together scholarship on early Indian urbanism and the linkage of political structure, technological change and urbanization, along with archaeological and textual evidences connecting it to the theoretical debates on the origin of cities. Urban centres are the outcome of underlying processes with key features such as social stratification, the institution of the state, craft specialization and a set of relationships with the hinterland. The economic setting, emergence of agriculture, pattern of rural settlements and evolution of agricultural communities is interlinked to these social processes and contribute to the urban process.

The author traces the evolution of the cultivating groups in the Malwa region, the earliest being the 'kayatha' culture (2000 BCE -1800 BCE ) when small agricultural communities spread over a 'uniform agricultural niche', having contact with the north west areas. This allowed for possible influence on institutional structure and craft specialization in Malwa. The next 'Banas' phase had affinity with Rajasthan and led to an increase in the size and interaction of agricultural groups. The Malwa phase (1600- 1300 BCE), named after a particular predominant type of pottery, is marked by a geographical expansion, use of copper technology and a consequent growth of settlements. Another phase of stable agricultural expansion known as the 'Jorwe' culture (1300-700 BCE), also saw the emergence of a variety of settlements. The author notes however, the frequent desertion of settlements, re-settlement and move to a more differentiated pattern of settlements and craft specialization in this time.

A new kind of social order seems to have emerged along with this economic development, new techniques of production and increased output. It resulted in a

growth in the number of settlements, concentration of units in the Ujjain area and brought into existence major settlements with fortifications, large buildings, roads, metal tools and long distance trade. By 500-600 BCE an urban social order was clearly taking shape. However, the author does not accept the idea that inherent needs and conflict of agricultural communities led to the emergence of state and urbanism, nor does he agree with the 'simplistic' notion that there was a progression from band to tribe to chiefdom to state, or with the view that the introduction of iron had any dramatic impact on material culture and urbanization. The emergence of urban centres and the origin of the state according to him, should be understood in the context of institutionalized community relations and the pattern of dominance by specific groups which culminated in the centralization of power and control over trade and trade centres.

An in-depth study of Sanchi from 300 BCE to 1000 CE reconstructs kinship structures, pilgrimage networks and class structure of urban society, through a focus on early buildings, patronage, forms of identity and social structure. According to the author, Sanchi represents a visible social structure which gave importance to acquired and universalistic relations, kinship and village identities which tied people to localism, and other professional work identities which linked them to the world at large. New identities thus, emerged modifying the existing forms of social organization, and acted together with political structure to create new regional identities. The crucial evidence at Sanchi, through rock art and stupas, depicts the concept of the universe, royalty, political power, urban and rural settlements as well as forest dwellings in an obvious hierarchical social order.

Literary evidence is used to substantiate the process of urbanization in Malwa. The area emerged as a distinct one with a prosperous city dominated by merchants and having definite bearing on the process of urbanism in early India. The image of the city and the countryside in literature is also taken up, specially of Ujjain, which reflected the personality of Malwa. The expansion of settlements and layout of towns and villages is also brought out clearly, and with it an exclusive urban community too, had emerged. It seems likely that a change in the social structure had occurred and urbanization on a larger scale led to a shift in rural groups from the country to the city and created a rural – urban divide.

Basant points out that studies in early Indian urbanization have been technologicistic in approach and have focused mainly on technical innovations and

creation of surplus, ignoring the role of moral-practical knowledge. The emergence of urban centres is linked to the agricultural development of the region. In tracing the evolution of urbanism he underlines that there is a replacement of kinship systems by the state. In fact, he is of the view that environmental factors and the migration by Yadavas to the Malwa region resulted in large scale desertion of settlements and warfare, due to a collision of two modes of life which eventually synthesized when Malwa became a part of the subcontinental tradition of polity and economy. The local communities were subjugated with Brahmanical ideology by the warrior or kshatriya groups who became dominant, appropriated the surplus and founded kingdoms with institutionalized political roles. The local people resettled under this new ruling class. Religion,

kinship, community and region were the constituents of the state and formalized under a variety of invisible actions, structures and institutions. Informal sites of power became part of the formal state along with large scale networks of contacts and exchange. Urban centres emerged in a parallel inter-related process linked to the centralization of power and formation of controls over the community. The process of centralization was taking place in politics, religion, economy and ideology which not only incorporated diverse traditions, but also linked them to each other and were a part of a larger world. P K Basant skillfully weaves together several strands to present an insightful new perspective on urbanization in India.

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THE PERIPHERY STRIKES BACK: CHALLENGES TO THE  
NATION-STATE IN ASSAM AND NAGALAND

by UDAYON MISRA

*Latest from IAS*

It is in the country's northeastern region, with its complex mosaic of ethnic nationalities at different stages of socio-economic and political growth, that the Indian nation-state is today facing some of its gravest challenges. Time and again, the Indian State has had to work out new strategies and adjustments to deal with the issues thrown up by the different autonomy and secessionist movements of the region. The process of nation-building received its first major jolt when the Nagas, a people virtually untouched by the freedom struggle, expressed their reservations about becoming a part of the newly independent republic and launched an armed struggle for an independent Naga homeland. But, it is the secessionist movement in Assam which seems to pose a much more serious challenge to the nation-state especially in view of the fact that the Assamese has had centuries of socio-cultural interaction with the rest of the subcontinent and had played a major role in the national struggle. Today, with its really complex ethnic situation, the insurmountable problem of influx and demographic change and the backward "colonial" state of the economy, Assam has emerged as the problem state of the Indian Union. This is a study which analyses in detail the socio-historical and political factors which have led to secessionist insurgency in states as different as Nagaland and Assam and shows how the future of the nation-state in India depends a lot on the ability to resolve the questions that are being thrown up by the struggles for a Swadin Asom and an independent Naga Lim.

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