

Book Reviews

Alka Hingorani. *Making Faces: Self and Images Creation in a Himalayan Valley*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012, pp. 166, US \$ 45.00.

In the lower foothills of the Himalayas, in the Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh, the largest local festival, Paush Navratri, takes place each autumn in the district capital of Kullu. The nine-day festival celebrates the goddess Durga Mahishamardini, and on the tenth day the festival of Dussehra begins. The latter worships in particular the triumph of Rama over Ravana, in addition to Vishnu, Shiva, Raghunathji, Ganga, Surya, Ganesha and other deities, devatas, and mountain deities and ancestors. Himachal is referenced in the *Mahabharata* as the place where the Pandavas went into exile after losing the dice game to Duryodhana; and local Kulutas fought on the side of the Kauravas in the great war. During the Pandavas' exile, Bhima married the *rakshashi* Hidimba, and in the region one can find temples to Hidimbadevi.

Thus, Himachal is rich in mythic history, which partly accounts for the longevity of the centuries-old Kullu Dussehra. On the first day, hundreds of visiting deities arrive from throughout the region to pay homage to Raghunathji at his temple. They are transported on heavy *palkhi* (palanquin) or *ratha* (chariot) from villages as far away as a hundred miles. Many of the villages are small, remote and situated at high elevations. On each *ratha*, the gods are materially present in the form of face-images or *mohras*—a term sometimes translated loosely as “masks,” though they are not worn, and they comprise not only the face but also the upper torso of the deities they embody. On a single *ratha*, eight to twenty-four *mohras* are arranged in rows of three or four, one row atop another, with a single large *mohra* above or below. Swathed in colorful embroidered silk and satin, adorned with jewels, and surrounded with flowers and appurtenances, the groupings are topped by an elaborate *chhatri* (parasol, umbrella), though smaller *chhatris* may be placed elsewhere. (Some scholars characterize *chhatris*

not as parasols but funerary tumuli or stupas). The people in the various villages, though often poor, share among themselves the expenses of the journey to Kullu, participating in the festival, decorating the *ratha*, maintaining *mohras* in *bhandars* associated with temples, and replacing *mohras* and *chhatris* when they wear out.

Mohras are approximately eight to fourteen inches high and five to eight inches wide. Generally, the most ancient ones (perhaps sixth century) were cast in brass, and later ones in bronze. Casting in modern times is with a metal alloy (for example, a blend of gold, silver, iron, lead, tin, mercury, copper, and zinc). In about the fifteenth century, *mohra* and *chhatri* began to be made by embossing silver and gold. The *mohra* and *chhatri* can be intricately crafted from thin, soft sheets of the metals. Because of their delicacy, they need to be replaced after about twenty-five years of use. Today, they are usually fashioned by a local craftsman, who is hired by a village. The craftsman is a *shudra*: he may be a *sunar* (goldsmith), or even from a *lohar jati* (a sub-caste of blacksmiths). While he is working, however, he is treated respectfully by members of upper castes, who share meals and living space with him. When the new *mohra* or *chhatri* is completed and consecrated, he returns to his caste status and can no longer touch it.

Art historian and scholar Alka Hingorani traveled to Kullu in 2002, 2003, and 2004, for varying periods, to conduct research on *chhatri* and *mohra*. Her new book, *Making Faces: Self and Image Creation in a Himalayan Valley* (2013), is the result—a beautifully illustrated and finely written study of the craft, ethnography, and aesthetics associated with making these sacred objects. To my knowledge, it is the first book published outside of India that focuses so closely on this subject.

Hingorani divides her book into four parts: Object, Process, Aesthetics, and Artisan. This is refreshingly straightforward, and the many stunning color photographs are helpful. But covering these dense topics in short chapters is quite ambitious in a book of only one hundred pages—though it can be argued that one cannot

begin to understand *mohra* except in a context comprising all of these parts. Hingorani manages to discuss the sacred objects in relation to religious art and local craft, Himchal social structures (including caste and religion), and individual artistry. She devotes about half of *Making Faces* to detailing the exacting labor of embossing in gold a particular *chhatri*, which she observed and photographed over many weeks.

Indeed, this is the best part of the book. In describing the crafting of the *chhatri*, Hingorani also describes the artisan, Taberam Soni. While observing and interviewing him, she lived in Khanag, walking-distance from Bhargole (population, eighty-five). Taberam had been commissioned by the Shesh Nag Temple in the small village of Kot to fashion a new twenty-four-carat gold *chhatri*. The old one was melted down, and a cube of newly purchased gold was blended with the salvaged metal. After the appropriate rituals, the embossing could begin. Taberam used handmade tools to hammer the ingot into a smooth disk twenty-one inches in diameter and less than a sixteenth of an inch thick. This first step alone is an impressive feat.

Given the many beauties and value of *Making Faces*, my disappointments are primarily that the book is not longer. While Hingorani's discussion of the crafting of the *chhatri* is excellent, her discussion of aesthetics and social context is, sadly, too brief. This is all the more disappointing because, while Hingorani understands the Indian tradition of aesthetics, she devotes half of her chapter on aesthetics to the theories of Hegel, Kant, Foucault, Barthes, Jameson, Chomsky, Bourdieu and other critics. The perspective of these Western intellectuals have a place, but they seem to crowd out the more pertinent traditional aesthetics and cultural nuances of India, and it feels unnecessary to attempt to reconcile their rhetoric with Indian concepts. A fuller exploration of local sensibilities—particularly in the context of Dussehra—might have been more productive and informative.

When Hingorani queries Taberam, she asks perceptive questions. For example, she notes that, when the *chhatri* is nearly completed, the onlookers say, "This is indeed beautiful," although it doesn't yet look quite right to Taberam. He responds, "It lacks weight." Then what does it mean for something to "look right"? Hingorani says,

Speaking of *vazan*—that is, weight or presence—is like referring to timbre in a voice or the sound of an instrument, a qualitative assessment that defies description, often challenges articulation (75).

In other words, for the knowledgeable artisan, the aesthetic qualities are suggested by the work, but are

inexpressible except experientially. This notion can lead the reader not to the West's preoccupation with constructed social space, transgression, subversion, and the complicity of the dominant and dominated. Rather, as in parts of her chapter on aesthetics and in her insightful notes, Hingorani rightly references Bharata's *Natyasastra*, Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka*, and Abhinavaagupta's *Abhinavabharati* as central to the aesthetic theories of *rasa* and *dhvani*. But she does not uncover the matrix that would fully connect them to her discussion of object, process, and ritual. *Rasa* theory is all the more relevant if the reader understands the implication of Hingorani's statement that in the Kullu Valley, "the making and receiving of objects . . . is always interactive, always a performance." In the *Natyasastra*, Bharata (or its several authors) elucidates *rasa* in precisely the terms of dramatic performance. The aesthetic focus in the tradition comprises an art's ability to facilitate a sudden spiritual and emotional "breakthrough," from the mundane and transient (*bhava*) to an ineffable and non-paraphrasable tranquility bordering on *moksa*.

As scholars such as Kathleen Marie Higgins have pointed out, the aesthetic theories of Abhinavagupta in particular challenge the West's ways of seeing art's function. The metaphor (rather, the indirect suggestiveness of an association) in *rasa* theory is tasting, rather than seeing. Abhinavagupta explains, "The spectator optimally moves from awareness of the emotional content of a performance [or work of art]... to a state of savoring... the emotional character in a universalized manner... *Rasa* is identical with the taste of one's own blissful self."

Just as Abhinavagupta comments on *rasa* as a presence in dramatic performance, perhaps it is useful to understand *mohras* not as objects but as inextricable parts of a performance—or ingredients in a meal—which began ages ago and will continue for as long as *rasa* is renewed in the communal celebration of Dussehra. While Hingorani could do more to explicate Abhinavagupta's very nuanced theory in relation to other aspects of her book, she compresses the theory beautifully in several places, such as at the end of her chapter on aesthetics. Here she relates Taberam's response to a print of Kali about to step on Shiva's prone body; unaware of Shiva's identity, Kali stops midstride. The depiction in the print, however, is wrong because, as Taberam observes, the artist has placed Kali's foot on Shiva; Kali's pause is the very essence of the story, he says. Thus, Taberam displays his aesthetics in his statement of what was "not right" in the picture: the moment as depicted was completed and so "staved possibilities, dissipated tension, drained the dramatic moment of its potency, Hingorani writes. "A

raised foot held in abeyance would have conveyed the conceit more appropriately . . . and allowed the imagination of the viewer a freer rein." Taberam's aesthetic observation is an appearance of Abhinavagupta's theory of *rasa* (the experiential awareness of an eternal, universal emotion) and *dhvani* (the overflowing of meaning conveyed in a suggestiveness arising from performance). Though it is questionable whether this is matter of "dialectics," Hingorni states this notion very well when she writes,

To keep to the object in isolation is to stay with the surface of things, whereas meaning is generated and kept alive through a process that involves the sustained participation of the community in the dialectic between idea and action, the interchange of expectation with response, which controls both change and continuity.

Even more pertinent here is when Abhinavagupta characterizes the experience of a spectator who is receptive to *rasa* as "a melting of the mind." And who can say where such intermixed metaphors of process, beauty, and cosmic performance will lead?

FRANK STEWART
Professor of English
University of Hawaii

Literature for Our Times: Postcolonial Studies in the Twenty-First Century, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Ranjini Mendis, Julie McGonegal, and Arun Mukherjee Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012, pp. xxxv+665.

Born out of the 14th international Triennial Conference of ACLALS held in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2007, *Literature for Our Times* is an ambitious volume in scope and breath of literatures and methodologies. As Ranjini Mendis notes in the preface, the conference theme was prompted by the desire to invite discussion about "the role of literature in our troubled time" (xi) and the range of essays comprised in the volume speaks to the urgency that writers and critics still feel about the function of writing in the social world. But this collection also has a second, and equally important, mandate. In the introduction, Bill Ashcroft reminds the readers that the volume appears about twenty years after the groundbreaking publication of *The Empire Writes Back*, a key text in bringing together the "textual attentiveness of Commonwealth literature and sophisticated approaches to contemporary theory" (xv) and facilitating the emergence of postcolonial studies. Time has come, Ashcroft notes, to bring the "radical reflexivity of the

field" to the contemporary moment: "What exactly are postcolonial studies? Does this field remain within observable or even locatable boundaries?" (xv). At a time when the institutionalization of world literature, globalization studies, and interdisciplinarity may seem to overlap with or confine postcolonial analysis to a historical, and thus passé, category, Ashcroft is keen to remind us that the "supplementarity" (xx) and "boundary-crossing" (xxi) of postcolonial studies is also what guarantees its dynamic nature and always contemporary thrust.

The collection comprises nine sections and afterword that illuminate the range of concerns and geographies attended to. Questions of method are at the forefront and make up Section I of the collection through the analysis of works spanning from the Caribbean to Canada and Australia. Of particular interest is Lincoln Z. Shlensky's discussion of the politics of speech in Jamaica Kincaid's work—especially in view of the fact that Kincaid herself has never embraced this descriptor—and the way in which her writing "helps to recontextualize postcoloniality as a performative rhetorical mode" (38). Orientalism and Said's critique of imperial scholarship informs the discussion of Daniel Roberts' essay on Thomas De Quincey's writing in light of Indomania and Indophobia, while Satish C. Aikant revisits the complexity of the history and discourse of the Indian rebellion of 1857 in a novella by Ruskin Bond.

Translation as a site of contestation, healing, and social bond is at the heart of the essays of Section III. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O points out the need to shift the relation between dominant and subjugated language to a notion of translation that counters "the dictatorship of monolingualism" and creates "a commonwealth of letters to feed the commonwealth of the human spirit" (122). Ngugi's own work is discussed in relation to translation in essays by John C. Hawley and Mumia G. Osaaji, while Robert Young engages with Ngugi's conceptualization of translation by drawing attention to the many languages that comprise 'English' literature and the shifting roles of English across local, national and transnational communities. A highlight of this section is Elena Basile's discussion of Hong-Kong born Canadian Jam Ismail's poetry, which, Basile notes, recasts translation as the sign of the "internal dissonance of languages at play within the subject herself" and a position that "inhabits the very constitution of the subject" (161). Here translation is poetic choice in order to heal the wound left on language by colonial cultural violence.

The transformative power of translation is effectively followed by discussions of diaspora and migrancy in texts spanning the Caribbean, Canada, India, and Fiji in Section

IV. Crossings and intersections are the focus of Dorothy Lane's analysis of two contemporary travel narratives from Canada and Australia. In these texts, the pilgrimage paradigm is particularly interesting in relation to the Orientalizing of the space of 'Sacred India' in Western scholarship. But pilgrimage, Lane notes, are also based on a kind of "'thinking across'—a visible grappling with translation and cross-cultural dialogue" (247). John Clement Ball attends to Jamaica Kincaid's work in relation to the 'Oceanic imaginary' of the Caribbean and the legacy of the Middle Passage, which he reads in conversation with the tension within Caribbean criticism between location and dislocation, or nationalism and diaspora. While at play in Kincaid's *Mr. Potter*, these oppositions, Ball notes, are invoked only to be simultaneously broken down. Wounds and oceans reemerge in Kavita Ivy Nandan's account of the indentured labourers' journey from India to Fiji in 1879, which the author reads in relation to the political rifts of contemporary Fiji, and the power of writing in healing the effects of racist policies in diasporas and migration throughout the world.

While many essays focus on gender and sexuality, only two make up Section V on gendered bodies—Feroza Jussawalla's discussion of "differential cultural rights" in texts by women from the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East addressing the practice of the veil and Cheryl Stobie's analysis of the effects of the patriarchal nuclear family on the female body in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

The following three sections address questions of space and subjectivity in different critical areas—Indigenous literature, Dalit Literature, and The City. Jeannette Armstrong's essay, "Literature of the Land: An Ethos for These Times," aptly foregrounds the concerns of this rich section in relation to land and ethics. Chelva Kanaganayakam provides a sophisticated discussion of the often invisible Filipino postcolonial writing in English and the specificity of a culture marked by the intersection with oral vernacular, Spanish, and English, as well as the relation with the American diaspora, while Stephen Ney also addresses the literature of the Philippines as the ground for the postcolonization of Christianity. Sam McKegney discusses two novels by Canadian First Nations writers Joseph Boyden and Richard Van Camp to address the thorny question of masculinity—i.e., "the anxiety about the lack of healthy models of masculine behaviours available to Indigenous youth" (360) and the danger of individualist violent mentor figures—with respect to Indigenous principles of kinship. While the section on Dalit literature is a fresh and welcome contribution to a literature that has gained little critical

attention, Pamela McCallum revisits the work of a much acclaimed 'multicultural' writer, Zadie Smith, by refocusing her critical gaze on the intersection of ideologies of nation, ethnicity, and class with the subject positions fashioned and refashioned on contemporary streets. Terrorism, grief, and trauma conclude the volume through powerful essays ranging from Fred Ribkoff's examination of the politics of mourning in the aftermath of the Air India Bombing, Summer Pervez' discussion of Hanif Kureishi's work on terrorism, racism, and Islamophobia, and Susan Spearey's sophisticated analysis of two post-conflict memoirs on South Africa and Rwanda by Antjie Krog and Philip Gourevitch. In raising questions about the role of writings of 'witnessing' and the conditions of uncertainty produced by the unassimilable traumatic event, Spearey convincingly shows that ethical action can only be situated, contextual, embodied, and intersubjective—a collaborative process that the memoirs also demand of their readers.

Henry Giroux' Afterword on youth, education, and the post-9/11 condition is an apt conclusion to a volume that bespeaks the contemporaneity of a field of studies that keeps producing fresh and wide-ranging contributions to the critique of old and new colonialisms, but also reclaiming the performative power of writing to reinvent the world.

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ALESSANDRA CAPPERDONI
Simon Fraser University

Allison Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. xv+339, US \$ 74.00.

Cultures, very often, imagine life in certain mono-cultural ways. But Indian culture, far from being a mono-culture of the sort we encounter in the western hemisphere, is

rather a conglomeration of cultures incessantly in dialogue within itself as well as with the outside world. The life of thinking, of being and of aesthetics which has evolved in such a constellation becomes multifaceted. Consequently, it is the strength of Indian culture that its indigenous thought and way of life, which reflect multiplicity of linguistic, cultural and religious influences and experiences, can boast of a multidimensional, hybrid intellectual worldview

Early modern period in Indian intellectual history, which is the focus of Allison Busch's book under review, *Poetry of Kings: The classical Hindi literature of the Mughal India* is a subtle and nuanced study of the Brajbhasha poetry from the Indian royal courts, which has long been an unmapped territory for the western scholarship. Consequently, it has been, so to say, up for grabs for literary and intellectual pursuits of the Hindi scholars the world over. Hence, like the late 18th century onwards that saw a dawn of the western interest in the Classical Sanskrit studies, the last quarter of a century, the period starting with the end of the 2nd Millennium till today, has experienced considerable growth in the western interest in the literary and cultural history of the early modern India, what has recently come to be called as Early Modern Literatures of North India.

With intellectual rigour and spatial familiarity with her subject matter Allison Busch, in her book focuses on the Riti poetry of the period between the 16th and early 19th Century produced at the local Indian royal courts. She brings fresh perspective and rare insight into this field which was largely dominated by Islamic influences. It extends from the emergence of Urdu as a language created at the confluence of multiple lingual and intellectual cultures and ends with the beginning of the colonial period in India. This is an age, which is characterised by a dialogue, though not always amicably pursued, between the Hinduism and Islam, which has given birth to a new language and a new architecture, but also to a composite new thinking, a new socio-religious culture.

Busch's book begins with contrasting the Indian attitude towards the pre-modern literature with the European attitude towards literature of the same period lamenting that "Indian courtly literature has been shunned by modern Hindi scholars" as it allegedly lacked classical qualities. She goes on to say that many Hindi scholars, in their discussion of the Riti literature, have not hesitated to show "their distaste for it." This intellectual rebuke, which sets the scope as well as pitch of what follows in the book, prompts me to put forward a *maxim* which would both lay open and sum up this extraordinary scholar's interpolations recorded in the

introduction of her meticulously placed argument. The maxim could be: *The knowledge of the world is complementary, but the approaches onto that are often contradictory, or at least they are in dissent even if the form is in consensus.* This maxim would postulate that it ultimately comes down to the 'approach' one chooses to apply in dealing with one's subject. *Approach* in the classical sense of the term means the path laid down by our forefathers. Hence it always appears to be safest if one walks the laid down path without deviating or questioning it. In this context Busch's argument lays bare that the scientific approach of the West is markedly different from what comprises a scientific approach in the East, at least in India. Contrary to the Greek objectivity, Indian thought subscribes to subjectivity. Objectivity believes in 'the' truth, and not 'your' or 'my' truth, whereas subjectivity helps accommodate different attitudes and imaginations.

Busch, who teaches Hindi and Indian Literature at Columbia University, has written and published extensively on Hindi literary culture of the Mughal period, which she has often referred to as early modern Hindi literature and intellectual history, concentrating thereby on the literary and intellectual life of seventeenth-century sub-imperial Indian courts. The literary-philosophical thought that was being formed during the period covered by *Poetry of Kings*, though greatly influenced by both the Hindu and Islamic lore, was neither purely Hindu nor purely Islamic. It gave rise to a number of analogously developing religio-intellectual social movements, whose main aim was to provide solace to the common man and promote tolerance. The movement with predominantly mystic Islamic elements came to be known as Sufism, and that with more devotional, Hindu-reformist elements, came to be known as Bhakti movement in Indian literatures. But Braj writings, often patronised by the local royal courts, were also employed to celebrate victory, as Busch's many examples illustrate. The first chapter of the book deals with Braj Poet Keshavdas's poetry in relation to the Bhakti literature which is more or less prevalent in all parts of India, but is predominantly a northern movement. There were other lesser known, though not less important, religious motivations emanating in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir, which are brought to light in *Poetry of Kings*.

The author further progresses like a careful traveller in an unknown country and tries to figure out how to give form to a literary epoch, rooted deeply both in devotion and indigenous literary craft. A compact discussion of the aesthetic background of Riti poetry, such as Alankarshastra, sets the pace. Her detailed

deliberations of Braj historiography, Riti literature at the Mughal Court, Riti literature at the Rajput Courts, logically pave way for the concluding chapter on the Fate of Riti Literature in Colonial India. The manner, in which she pursues her passion, while letting the literary works arise from a virtual oblivion, is phenomenal. In a span of six chapters Busch has discovered defining tools of a literary culture and shaped them into a persuasive work of art which is bound to go a long way to draw the attention of the English reading intelligentsia for greater engagement with India's literary wealth, the study of which is now gathering momentum.

Historically the book is organized around the complex literary socialization of India's pre-modern society, which was often referred to as feudal. However, there are a few problems with the terminology used in the book. The use of the term "classical" pertaining to a period literature, for example, is not without problems. The use of the term *Classical Hindi* in relation to Riti or Braj poses more serious problems. As we all know, every language has regional variations. So Busch has chosen to tread a path which is full of thorns. She has to deal with the subject matter of a period in India which is so complex that many a scholar would prefer to simply seal it in the way the ill-fated reactors in Chernobyl were sealed, once and for all. But, then, art isn't a static thing. Let the debate and discussion go on.

RAJVINDER SINGH
National Fellow
IIAS, Shimla

Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom And Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp. 212, price not mentioned.

The present collection of seven essays explores the making of modernity in Bengali culture through the examination of a variety of examples – some unusual, some domestic, some taken from 19th century daily urban life, and some from today's literary criticism looked at through an unconventional prism. The author, who is a fellow with the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, has traversed a wide area ranging from Bengali eating habits under the impact of colonial culture to Bengali poetry's changing response to that culture, from Bengali drawing room style to the Bengali interaction with the Anglo-Indian community (otherwise known as Eurasian, in the 19th century).

The initial search for modernity among the 19th century young educated Bengalis was, curiously enough, marked

by the choice of a particular cuisine – roast beef ! In a peculiar intermeshing, beef became the symbol of Western superiority over Indians, the consumption of which was supposed to make Indians both modern and acquire physical prowess, which in its turn would equip their nationalist ideology with enough strength to drive out the British from their soil. Chaudhuri deals with this interesting logic (which inspires the title of her book) in her first essay – ‘Young India: A Bengal Eclogue’; or Meat-eating, Race, and Reform in a Colonial Poem.’ The poem referred to above was composed by an Englishman in 19th century Calcutta, Henry Meredith Parker, lampooning the group called ‘Young Bengal’, who were students of his friend, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, another young European who taught at the city’s Hindu College. Under his tutelage, these Bengali students discovered the new ideological concepts of freedom and nationalism that were sweeping contemporary Europe, and were inspired to launch an onslaught, often aggressive, on the symbols of their own conservative and restrictive Hindu religious order. Along with serious polemical articles in their English and Bengali journals, challenging the orthodoxy of the prevalent Hindu society, they also indulged in provocative acts to express their defiance of the norms of that society. Most of them came from upper caste Hindu society. While some openly denied the holy sanctity of the Ganga, others flung away the Brahminical thread (required to be carried around their shoulders) as a superstitious practice. The most extreme form of such defiance was the public demonstration of eating beef in Gol Dighee (known as College Square today) in the centre of Calcutta, bang opposite the Calcutta University. Beef was held repugnant by conservative Hindu society which worshipped the cow as a mother – *gau-mata*. The Young Bengal radicals thus chose the most vulnerable spot of the orthodox Hindus to attack their beliefs. Parker in his poem poked fun at such excessive demonstrations of these young Bengalis whom he caricatured as aping the English in their dress and behavior. But while Parker resorted to good humoured ridicule, half a century later his countryman Rudyard Kipling indulged in a vicious campaign against the educated Bengali class depicting them as an inferior species. Chaudhuri finds in this difference, “the deterioration of race relations between the coloniser and the colonised subject” that had taken place over the years.

A common character who walks through most of these essays is the young teacher Derozio, who had been celebrated by historians of nineteenth century Bengal as a revolutionary poet. Chaudhuri throws light on two

hitherto neglected sides of his thinking – first, his opposition to the ban on widow-burning “as he felt it hurt the strongly felt prejudices of the Hindu,” and secondly, his communal construction of the Muslim stereotype as the distrustful ‘other.’ In one essay, ‘An Ideology of Indianness,’ she points out that like many contemporary Bengali Hindu nationalist writers, Derozio also shared the belief that the pre-British period of Muslim rule in India was one of unmitigated tyranny. Chaudhuri takes up two of his poems – *The Ruins of Rajmahal* and *The Fakeer of Jungheera* – to illustrate the point, situating them in the framework of the well-known argument that “nationalism in India created a Hindu identity that constructed as its opposite, the Muslim as other.” Derozio reappears in the next essay – ‘The Politics of Naming’ – this time as a European citizen of Calcutta identifying himself with its native residents. Here the writer examines the various dimensions of a controversy that broke out in the Calcutta press in 1825 over some derogatory remarks made by a newspaper about the mixed race community that called itself by various appellations: Eurasian, Anglo-Indo-Briton, etc. Derozio preferred to call himself East Indian, thereby claiming to be a native of India due to his birth on its soil, and extending the claim to his identification with Indian nationalism (all the more striking since Derozio came from European parentage, his father being a Portuguese and his mother an Englishwoman). Following him, several liberal-minded Europeans born in India took up the appellation East Indian, trying to eradicate their differences from the mixed race Eurasians.

In another interesting essay (‘Three Poets in Search of History’), Chaudhuri situates Derozio (who wrote in English) in the company of two contemporary poets in Bengali – Ishwar Gupta and Anthony Firingi. But while Gupta was a thorough-bred Bengali writing in his own language, Anthony Firingi was a Portuguese who settled down in Bengal, learnt to speak Bengali and emerged as a famous *kobial* (composer and singer) in Bengali oral culture. Chaudhuri while examining the different notions of historicity that co-existed in the early part of 19th century Bengal, locates Derozio as a representative of the European romantic understanding of time and history as played out in memory (in his poems about ancient ruins); Ishwar Gupta as rooted to the indigenous tradition of a poetry of everyday life re-constructed in an urban modern environment; and Anthony Firingi as occupying a “space that questioned previously held beliefs and practices”, and representing a new public culture of the lower orders that was to be looked down upon both by the Derozians and the upper class Hindu

bhadraloks.

The essay 'Modernity at Home' is yet another attempt to explore modernity in another area of Bengali living - the emergence of the modern drawing room in upper class Bengali homes (with particular reference to the Tagore household) with the adoption Western décor and furniture, but indigenized by the use of native motifs and designs in curtains and cushions. What is missing in her essay however, is the domesticated modernity in the cramped one or two-roomed rented Bengali middle class households in apartments (known as *flat-baris*) that had emerged in Calcutta by the 1930s. In these households, the bedroom was turned into a drawing room in the evenings, with the newly introduced modern gadgets like the radio and gramophone entertaining both the residents and their guests, who shared the beds and a few skeletal wooden chairs that adorned those households - with of course the ubiquitous tea (which Chaudhuri mentions as another sign of westernized modernity) being served at every odd hour !

In the next essay 'Refashioning Milton', Chaudhuri juxtaposes the modernist reading of Milton with that of the 19th century Bengali poet Madhusudan Dutta in the present day, when comparisons are often sought to be made between Milton's tendency to use Latinate neologisms and Madhusudan's import of Sanskrit words in his poetry as a desire to return to the indigenous classical. Chaudhuri however appears to ignore Madhusudan's simultaneous forays in Bengali dramatic literature with his farces (*Ekei ki boley Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rmo*) where he lets loose a delightful flood of raw colloquial Bengali dialogue, as distinct from the artificial and heavily Sanskritized poetry of his *Meghnadbadh Kavya*. In fact, modern critics should explore this creative side of Madhusudan's as a social satirist (also expressed in his numerous letters), and the incomplete possibilities of his development as a modern playwright of contemporary Bengal. Another minor point. Madhusudan was not always "feted by educated Bengalis across the spectrum" as assumed by the author. One of his contemporaries, a minor poetaster, lampooned his epic poem by bringing out a full-fledged parody called *Chhuchhundar-badh Kavya* (meaning - an epic on the assassination of the mole), which was a popular hit in Calcutta in those days !

But it is the last essay ('The Flute, Gerontion, and Subalternist Misreadings of Tagore'), where Chaudhuri raises the more fundamental question of the controversial relationship between history and literature in both modern history writing and literary output. She picks up a particular text - Rabindranath's essay *Sahitye Aitihāsikata* (written in 1941) - and the numerous debates,

additions and alterations that surrounded it during his lifetime, followed by (mis)interpretations by the modern group of subaltern historians. She crosses swords with the doyen of this group, Ranajit Guha, expressing misgivings with his reading (in his 'History at the Limit of World History' - 2002) of Tagore's original thesis. Guha, she argues, misinterprets what was Tagore's main thrust against literary critics whom the poet accused of "preoccupation with history and realism," as a wholesale attack on academic historians in general. Taking a cue from this mistaken understanding of Tagore's viewpoint, Guha according to Chaudhuri, blurs "the line separating history writing from literary creativity, demanding that history be written in literary terms." Chaudhuri, on the contrary, feels that Tagore was "not really bothered about historians or the discipline of history and how it deals with facts; he is concerned, rather, about the business of creative writing and how that should deal with facts." Chaudhuri thus harks back to the old arguments about authenticity in the representation of past historical facts as well as the contemporary surrounding reality in literature - an issue that boggles the minds of both historians and creative writers.

An extremely well-researched book, sparkled by light-hearted narrations, Chaudhuri's work raises major issues relating to the tensions between modernity (derived from the West) and indigenous traditions in colonial Bengal. At the end of it, those searching for an authentic pure native culture will be disappointed. Whether you call it 'contaminated' (in a pejorative sense), or 'cosmopolitanized' (in an appreciative sense) by the West, modern Bengali language and literature had been a product of traditional acculturation of various streams - ancient tribal animist, later Buddhist and Sanskrit, followed by Persian-Arabic-Urdu influences, to end with the entry of the modern European. Modernity in Bengal thus drew its inspiration from both a hoary indigenous past and a complex corpus of European history.

SUMANTA BANERJEE
Fellow
IIAS, Shimla

Rizwan Qaiser, *Resisting Colonialism and Communal Politics: Maulana Azad and the Making of the Indian Nation*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2011, pp. 374. ₹ 950.00.

From time to time nationalist political processes and the individuals in its centre have interested historians, scholars and writers into interpreting and analysing the significance of their historicity. Nonetheless, it is

important to mention that historical processes are greatly shaped by idiosyncrasies and ideological trajectories of individual(s). The narrative of India's political struggle is replete with many such examples, though there are several that have not yet been examined, thus circumscribing the scope of historical narration. The book under review attempts to address such issues to highlight the achievements of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the leader who always remained in the vanguard of India's struggle for freedom shaping nation's destiny in pre and post colonial eras.

The inexplicable silence on the eventful political life of Azad has prompted Rizwan Qaiser to produce this book. At the very outset, the author objectively discusses the strengths and weaknesses of earlier works on Azad including those by Mahadev Desai, A.B.Rajput, Ian Henderon Douglas, V.N.Datta and Syeda Saiyidain Hamid to name a few (25-31).

In this seminal work Qaiser attempts an authentic, critical and insightful assessment of Azad's political career through one of the most eventful phases of Indian history spanning several years of tireless resistance to colonialism and communalism. For nearly six decades of his life, Azad waged relentless and uncompromising resistance to communal and colonial forces, which is well documented by the author. Through this narrative, Azad emerges as a versatile figure, a humanist, a Muslim, an intellectual, a nationalist and more importantly as a nation builder.

Salience of Maulana Azad's political articulation acquires prominence since he encouraged Muslims' participation in the freedom movement even before it had assumed a nationalist manifestation after Mahatma Gandhi launched the Champaran Satyagraha (Bihar) in 1917 and later the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1920s. Involvement with *Yugantar* in the heyday of anti-Bengal partition agitation of 1905 was Azad's initial tryst with nationalism. But what launched him frontally was *Al-Hilal*, a journal that Azad initiated in 1912 with commitment to arouse consciousness within his community on political and religious issues, followed by another journal the *Al-Balagh*. These journals were Azad's mouthpieces through which he addressed all major upheavals impacting national and communal lives including pan Islamism and colonialism successfully establishing 'political dialogue' with the community while himself scornfully earning epithets of "well informed" yet "dangerous" man (54) from the British. It is argued by the author that Azad invoked the authority of religion in order to galvanise Muslims' political action against colonial oppression and in articulating such a resistance, maintained his focus on Hindu-Muslim unity.

Perhaps, this model brings him closer to Gandhian concerns as the latter's emphasis on religion was to invoke popular participation yet was deeply concerned about the unity of the two communities.

In the years 1923-34 Azad was increasingly drawn toward the Indian National Congress. It was also the time when the larger phenomenon of Gandhian impact became evident, yet ironically communalism too manifested itself in its ugliest form. After the collapse of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement alliance, it was leaders like Maulana Azad who devoted themselves to sustaining the cause of composite culture keeping optimism of the people alive in the national movement that had suffered a jolt after the Chauri-Chaura incidence of 1922. In such vitiated scenario, Azad chose the path of 'integrative politics' that was also to serve as a political tool for the next crucial decades of political struggle directed at instilling confidence among Muslims in larger nationalist framework, particularly in the Congress. The author maintains that the challenges of communal incidences, riots, shuddhi-sangathan, the Rangeela Rasool controversy (118-19) posed serious impediments to Azad's framework of integrative politics. Widening communal polarisation coupled with declining power sharing were alienating Muslims from the Congress and Qaiser argues that these unaddressed issues made the viability of Muslim leadership vulnerable in the eyes of its own community that also circumscribed performance of Azad to his best. Azad's endeavour to seek Muslim support for the Congress by founding the All India Nationalist Muslim Party in 1929 too failed to generate the desired result. The nationalist Muslims were pushed to the margins and felt alienated that weakened the nationalist force in the wake of which Muslim League became active and relatively strong. It is argued by the author that even as Azad emerged on the political horizon as leader of the Muslims to soon acquire national prominence, paradoxically he found the grounds shrinking within his own community as his rank in Congress grew and as freedom movement progressed. This paradox is succinctly encapsulated by Qaiser in the following words "the greatest tragedy in his (Azad's) life was that at the dawn of independence, politically he did not have a following in his own community as well among his countrymen" (265). Insensitivities shown by Congress in safeguarding issues of identity and culture, inability to check the growing incidence of communal riots, dwindling fortunes and failure to accommodate Muslims within its gamut of power structure were some very basic reasons responsible for lack of confidence of Muslims in the Congress and its leaders. Intricacies of challenges and possibilities experienced by Muslims in the process of

accommodation and assimilation are explored through exposition on Azad's political trajectories by the author.

The argument that partition was unavoidable given that in the 1946 election Muslims were overwhelmingly in favour of creation of Pakistan can be contested in the light of the assertion that success in any election cannot be treated a final verdict in justifying such momentous decision as partition. During the time, voting right was based on the considerations of property, education and taxation that enabled only those who successfully fulfilled the above criteria to vote in elections and hence election result did not represent the sentiments of the majority that actually stood disfranchised. It is no less than a mere hastily drawn conclusion in justifying the decision of India's partition by disproportionately placing it in the context of Muslim League's electoral success in 1946. It can be further argued as how can a handful votes validate partition that determined fate of millions who got trapped in the traumatic holocaust for no fault of theirs? Responses of secular individuals, religio-cultural institutions and regional tilts that ran counter to partition are ignored when the rubric of Muslims' monolithic support is employed in defence of partition. Creation of Pakistan was not the result of consensus of a community but more a product of intransigence of M.A. Jinnah and Congress' acquiescence to the same with colonial representatives hastening the process. Had the Congress put up a tough resistance to the demand of partition by Muslim League, the result could have been different.

Also, partition failed to check the lurking dangers (Noakhali in Bengal and regions in Bihar were already in the grip of gory communal conflagration in 1946) and violence in all forms, that human mind could hardly fathom, were unleashed on innocent minorities, women and children across the borders without the slightest sense of remorse or repentance by its perpetrators. A.G. Noorani bemoaned that "*the partition of the sub-continent of India deserves to rank as one of the 10 great tragedies in recorded human history... it is not only the loss of human lives and property but the near-fatal blows on cultures that mark its distinctively hideous features*"¹ It can be argued that for India, being a repository of composite culture, communalism proved more damaging than colonialism, though it is another fact that the latter furnished fertile ground for the growth of the former. The venom of communalism which has been spreading over the years has caused irreparable damage to the psyche of the people. Partition caused untold misery to the people, leading to insane killing of innocents, displacement of millions, uncertain fate of *Muhajirs* (migrants) and minorities across the border, problems of rehabilitation, relocation and repatriation, Bangladesh crisis, Indo-

Pakistan wars and the Kashmir issue.

Qaiser laments that Maulana Azad's resistance to partition has not been objectively and justifiably assessed and historians have considered the partition of India as a failure and defeat for Azad. Qaiser argues that '*Azad never wavered in his conviction that religion could ever become the basis of formation of nationhood and therefore communities would have to be coalesced into a single nationhood*' (352). Ever strident in contesting colonialism and communalism, the unity factor had always been the major concern for Azad that he valued even more than independence of the country. Azad had once exhorted that "*even if an angel were to descend from the high heavens and proclaim from the heights of the Qutub Minar to abandon the mission of Hindu-Muslim unity and swaraj will be awarded within twenty-four hours, I will refuse the swaraj. The delay of swaraj will affect Indians but the end of our unity will be the loss of the entire human race.*"² Such proclivities of secular leaders particularly Muslims were definitely ignored by the Congress at the time when decision to partition was taken. Qaiser not only makes a breakthrough in this regard but his work revisits the issue of partition, analysing the basis of its logic and the aftermath.

Post partition, Maulana Azad provided the much needed healing touch by his constructive role in shaping India's future. Indian secularism is ingrained in its cultural strands and perhaps it was this experience that Maulana Azad was able to harp upon in the interest of the nation. As Minister of Education, Azad initiated several educational, scientific and cultural programmes and institutions that are discussed elaborately in the last chapter of the book. Qaiser particularly asserts that Azad accomplished the task of ushering India into realm of educational, scientific and cultural advancements despite the fact that he never had the privilege of attaining formal education himself nor had training in the art of setting up such institutions. The author rightly observes that "*these institutions were product of Azad's imaginative anticipation, visualisation and planning and was ably supported by men of standing like S.S. Bhatnagar, Humayun Kabir, Dr. Tarachand and K.G. Saiyidain*" (327). The setting up of Sahitya Akademi, Lalit Kala Akademi, Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, IIT Kharagpur, the University Grants Commission, Visva Bharati earning status of Central University are some landmark testimonies of Azad's commitment and service in the fields of education and culture.

Rizwan Qaiser's book on Maulana Azad is well researched and comprehensively documented. The author deals with several dimensions of the personality and political career of Azad making it a mandatory reading for students of modern Indian history and culture

and in particular for those interested in historical developments in South Asia. A number of sources have been provided in Urdu bringing to light details of Azad's political career dispelling several myths and ascribing Maulana Azad his rightful place in history.

NOTES

1. A.G. Noorani, 'Horrors of Partition' in *Frontline*, 9 March 2012, p.73.
2. Shabi Ahmad, 'The Making of a Nationalist Muslim: A Study of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Foundation of his Political Views' in Mahavir Singh (ed.), *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Profile of a Nationalist*, Kolkata: MAKAIAS, 2003, p. 90.

MEHER FATIMA HUSSAIN
Assistant Professor
Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia

Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation, edited by Sankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya. Hyderabad/Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp.180.

Alongside the slogans proclaiming 'shining India,' 'incredible India' and the like, there exists an India that defies these adjectives. A large chunk of India living under the flyovers of our glittering metropolises or in ghettos or along the railway lines or in *bastis* in villages is what we tend not to take note of. However, those who live on the margins have finally found their voice and call for our attention. And once we hear them, we are bound to realize that their legitimate cry cannot be questioned; they may express themselves bitterly or mildly, with a whimper or with a roar, with rage or with anguish but they *do* have the potential to make us aware. This writing coming from the oppressed sections of the society has made its presence felt in a way which no academician or litterateur can afford to ignore. The book under review *Survival and Other Stories: Bangla Dalit Fiction in Translation* contains short stories providing "a wide spectrum of issues and concerns that dalit people encounter in contemporary social interactions," to quote the editors.

The eighteen stories that make the anthology come from divergent sections of the dalit society of Bengal – small cultivators, fishermen, landless farmers, women, the untouchables and their sub-castes, the nomads and the Hindu migrants from Bangladesh. These are the

voices of dissent and resistance coming from those living on the edge. The word dalit here does not refer only to those listed under Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes; it has been used in its broader sense to include all those who are 'crushed' or 'ground'; all those who are culturally marginalized, economically exploited and politically oppressed.

The beauty and appeal of fiction lies in the fact that it does not "tell", rather it recreates. Recreation goes straight into the heart and has the force to evoke empathy. The pain and struggle of the oppressed that we but vaguely understand and sympathise with become real as we read these tales of suffering, hopelessness and dejection and occasional revolt. When little Munnali, the eleven year old protagonist of the story 'Munnali' flops down like "a broken basket, neglected and discarded," because she is not acceptable in the kitchen of the "bhadrak", the upper caste people, we are left with a queasy feeling: "how can we help her and the likes of her for whom all doors are closed because of the disadvantages of the caste they are born into?" But read on, and Maunnali's trouble would appear minor as compared to what we encounter – myriads of more burning problems, more negations and more harrowing experiences as in the story 'The Other Jew'. Yet these unfortunate ones are broken but not defeated; they have the guts to survive and fight; they are resilient only to bounce back and defy the system as in 'On Firm Ground'. Like Edwin Markham — of 'The Man with the Hoe' fame— the dalit writers seem to ask: what will happen to the future when "this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world/After the silence of centuries?"

Each story offers a different spectrum of experience; each story recreates a world of emotions in their varied forms: fear, anger, pity, compassion, affection, fellow feeling and despair; in each story the human interaction takes place in wide-ranging locations; and each story provides valuable insights into human nature and the dalit consciousness. In the process the customs, attitudes and activities of the people get illuminated sometimes leaving us with bewildering questions. In 'Reincarnation of Parashuram', for example, the author Anil Gharai shows the ignorance and superstitious mind-set of a tribal family who fall in the trap of a witch-doctor (the Gunin). At his behest, the son chops his old and ailing mother to death believing her to be a witch who is out to devour his infant son. Unfortunately, these people cannot see the obvious that the child was suffering from malnutrition. Though the title of the story is a pointer towards the mainstream power structure and the need to resist it, the message is clear: it is the lack of education that is

responsible for their troubles from which they need to be wrenched out.

If Gobind Shoundo's 'On Water and on Shore' narrates the story of an unfortunate fisherman's struggle to survive on the turbulent waters of the sea that has devoured his son, Makhanlal Pradhan's story 'Farmer Gopal's Caste and Creed' shows the game our politicians and land sharks play to lure the farmers out of their land with lofty promises only to leave them in the lurch. Gopal is made to sell his land and is ultimately reduced to becoming a bonded labour. While high-rise buildings may emerge on what were once the dancing paddy fields, as symbols of development, the poor hapless farmers like Gopal would be forced to swallow their self-esteem to keep the hearth burning. Stories such as these pose a big question mark on the lop-sided concepts of development.

'Bazaar' on the one hand can be read as the frantic efforts of an anxious wife to divert her husband's attention from the *haat* (the area of prostitutes); on the other it can be read as a sad commentary on the fate of tender tribal girls who are engaged apparently as servants but are made to satisfy the lust of their middle-aged masters. Here, the connivance of the wife is hard to condone. 'Footprints of an Elephant' and 'Survival' are narratives of survival: the former depicts the struggle of an old man to cope with human deceit and the latter, the fierce fight with death as the protagonist tries to scoop out grain from the snake-pit.

The authors coming from different parts of Bengal and

different ethnic groups offer a kaleidoscopic view of their societies. Besides poverty and suffering their other themes are: the changing times; the onslaught of urban culture on rural society; the tribal ethos disappearing because of the intrusion of politics; the greed of the rich; the indignities of caste-system and also in-fights within the dalit sub-castes. The stories are insightful and eloquent. The translation is evocative and succeeds in capturing the rhythm and spirit of the native Bengali/dalit idiom. At no point of time does one feel uncomfortable with the language.

The 'Foreword' and 'Preface' succinctly comment on dalit literature and the need for translations such as these. 'Introduction' is exhaustive and useful. Sankar Prasad Singha and Indranil Acharya provide a brief survey of the Bangla dalit writings and the scope and concerns of translation of dalit literature. The Glossary appended to some of the stories makes the reading more informed and lucid while notes on authors and translators are valuable additions for an academician. It is ironic, however, that no dalit female writer gets representation in the anthology. On the whole, *Survival and Other Stories* provides an eye-opening read and I have no reservations in recommending it to prospective readers.

USHA BANDE
Former Fellow
IIAS, Shimla

KASHMIR'S NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT

by MANISHA GANGAHAR

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The book reflects upon, delves into and contests the idea of 'Kashmiriyat'. It seeks to find the ambiguity regarding Kashmiri identity and explore how ordinary Kashmiris negotiate spaces in their lives—political, regional and religious—particularly since Kashmir became a disputed territory and a conflict zone. The aim is to get a grip on whether normal day-to-day reporting, literary writings and cinematic productions carry with them an understated or underlying sense of betrayal or injustice, anger or simple ill-will or prejudices; and, how all these permeate into the region's conscience unknowingly.

Manisha Gangahar has done her doctorate from Panjab University, Chandigarh. Her area of specialization is postcolonial studies. She has worked with Hindustan Times, written review articles for national dailies, and published papers in national and international journals. She was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, from 2011 to 2013. At present she is Assistant Professor of English at SD College, Chandigarh.

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