

Feminism in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Shashi Deshpande is one of the most prolific woman writers in English in contemporary India. She has written nine novels, six collections of short stories, four books for children and a screen. She is recipient of several literary awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence*. As a writer Shashi Deshpande is rooted in reality. In an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom in 1993 she said :

"My background is very firmly here, I was never educated abroad, my novels don't have any westerners, for example, they are about Indian people and the complexities of our lives..... My English is as we use it".¹

Her writing is clearly a part of Indian literature and emerges from her deep root in middle class Indian society. She uses a very simple language to describe simple lives specially of the Indian women.

In almost all the novels Shashi Deshpande deals with a crisis in the life of her protagonist. In this sense her work is women-oriented, yet it would be unjust to brand her as a feminist for there is nothing "doctrinaire" about her writings. It is a mere indepth portrayal of a woman and the meaning of being a woman in modern India. With the exception of *The Binding Vine*, the major events, in all the novels of Shashi Deshpande take place after the heroine returns to her natal home. About women, the focal point of her writings, Deshpande writes :

"Most of my writing comes out of my intense

and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be woman in our society. It comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles conjoined upon me by society, out of the knowledge that I am something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman".²

The *Dark Holds No Terrors*, the first novel by Shashi Deshpande is a totally different novel in the sense that it explores the myth of man's unquestionable superiority. The novel focuses on women's awareness of her predicament, her desire to be recognised as a person not as a woman and to have an independent social image. Saru's feminist reactions date back to her past, when she had to be contented with sexist discrimination at home. Her mother loves her brother but hates her. And when he is drowned, she blames her for no fault of her own. "You killed him. Why didn't you die ? Why are you alive, when he is dead ?" This is the plight of not only Saru but millions who are born as girls. The fault lies with the gender, not with them, it brings into focus the concept of gender which is man-made. Breaking the bonds Saru leaves home. This is her first social defiance of the patriarchal power system. Saru's defiance is further focused, when she becomes economically independent and marries Manohar on her own. Saru's marriage with Manohar is a means to get away from her home. But she is disappointed with her married life. Marriage is the promised end in a traditional society, but in feminist fiction it restricts the movement towards autonomy and self-realisation.

Saru grows up and receives education against the will of her mother when she gets herself into Medical

College. There she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents' will. Her mother, being old, traditional, and orthodox, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste.

Manu, her husband, is a symbol of love and security which she has always lacked in her life. Manu turns an ideal romantic hero who has come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless world. Saru who has lacked love in her life finds a saviour in Manu. "I was insatiable, not for sex but for love, of being loved, of my being wanted."

Manu and Saru's wedded life becomes happy and prosperous. Manu expresses "When we're together, it's heaven..." Saru emerges as a successful, well known and reputed doctor. Now, the happiness in her wedded life begins to be shaken due to success in her profession, when she establishes herself as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. Manu, her husband, cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him. He expresses his irritation "I am sick of this place, let us get out of here soon." He does not love her the way he used to earlier. She starts hating the man-woman relationship which is based on attraction and need, not love.

Jaya, the protagonist and heroine of *That Long Silence* is an intelligent woman with good academic qualification, a career and a considerable amount of success. But none of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of Mohan. Gender conditioning makes women vulnerable and silent. Mohan, Jaya's husband, is the victim of misappropriation of office funds that creates trouble

for him. An enquiry is set up against him, and he has been advised to hide himself till the case is over. Jaya and Mohan start to live in a comfortable Dadar flat which has been given by Jaya's uncle. Away from the trap of family life, she suffers from isolation. She fails to be closer to her husband mentally. Her husband cannot understand her feelings. Her life with Mohan appears to her a meaningless exercise of living together, a fact she admits in a mood of utter frustration. "We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us."

She suffers from alienation and mutters in anguish : "I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well- the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid motherly woman. A woman who coped". No doubt, love, compassion, tolerance, kindness and faithfulness are widely acknowledged traits of female nature but self-realisation and self-expression are not to be viewed as opposed to their values. She re-appraises her own role-enactment, placing the sacred icons of marriage and family life under the light of a mercilessly honest examination. Marriage turns out to be just another enclosure in which a woman has to confine herself. She has no freedom to assert herself.

She has to suppress her emotions because her husband Mohan warns her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her." She feels that she used to be like Fanny Price in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*-Fanny who had to subdue all her wishes in favour of the Bertram family.

Jaya is gifted with a talent for creative writing; she had given up her writing just because Mohan does not like it. A desire of self-expression spurs every creative writer and if it is smothered, it creates

suffocation and frustration. Jaya's imaginative writing is condemned by her husband as "self revelation" when she writes a story- a story about a husband and a better-half, a husband who could not reach out to his better-half except through her body. Her husband gets it too personal and asks. "How could you have done it? How can you reveal us? How can you reveal our life to the world in the way?" She loses her identity as a writer. She compromises with writing silly things for a woman's magazine which does not satisfy her intellectual hunger. She has badly neglected her 'real' self. But now she decides to come out of the nest because life has become intolerable and suffocating to her. She realizes that she is being defeated; her voice is being hushed up by the ideal notions thrust upon her by the male dominated society. Towards the end of the novel she emerges as a bold and mature woman who refuses to be merely a shadow of her husband. She firmly resolves to break the silence that has been at the root of all troubles in her life, "I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us."

Silence is a destructive device. It implies shame, guilt, suffering and even death. Self-expression is the basic human right. Jaya breaks the silence, writes her story and concludes. "We can always hope without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this; life has always to be made possible."

Deshpande has dealt very deftly the problems of middle class educated women. Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle class women.

The soul of the novel lies in the inner conflict

and search for identity of women. Deshpande deals with the inner problem of women's psyche. Even today the educated Indian women give preference to marriage and their family life. Deshpande supports this feeling. She has the microscopic observation regarding the inner urge of Indian educated women.

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Nayantara Sahgal : A Critical Study of her Women Characters

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In the first half of the twentieth century feminist consciousness in Indian literature and politics is quite discernible. The year 1927 experienced the formation of All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and publication of Premchand's *Nirmala* in Hindi which has rightly been claimed to be the first psychological novel in Hindi. The predicament of Nirmala the protagonist epitomizes the sufferings of common Indian women under the oppressive patriarchal structure. '*Nirmala*' presents the seamy side of social realism unlike '*Sevasadan*' or '*Premashram*' which presents idealistic finale or happy end of the story. In the AIWC, activists like Renuka Ray, Vijaya Lakshami Pandit, Hansa Mehta and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya deviated from Gandhiji and rejected the Puranic view of womanhood. They strove to consolidate a radical movement aimed to create for women a world free from male dominance. The years from about 1936 to 1954 were the heyday of a hugely influential radical cultural movement that spanned several regions and languages across India (as well as the region that became Pakistan). Represented by, though not restricted to, the formation of the All-India Progressive Writer's Association in 1936 the manifesto of which reads the agenda of postcolonial reconstruction. The PWA was concerned with a diversity of issues beyond nationalism that they saw as integral to the transitional period of decolonisation.

The writer's primary task in this context of the 'radical changes' already underway was to counter backlash, or reactionary and revivalist tendencies on

questions like family, religion, sex, war and society. Even a cursory glance at the prodigious, body of PWA related work in Urdu alone, ranging from the publication of '*Angarej*' in 1932 to the texts produced during 30s and 40s by authors such as Rashid Jahan, Rajinder Singh Bedi, K.A. Abas, Mulk Raj Anand, Ismat Chughtai, Sasadat Hasan Manto, Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Krishan Chander, indicates that gender and gender relations remained a central concern for these literary radicals. Besides these, Premchand's '*Nirmala*' published serialwise in women's own magazine '*Chand*' from Nov. 1925 to Nov. 1926 bears ample testimony to feminist consciousness in Indian literature. Premchand's '*Nirmala*' suffers terribly under the dilemma to fit as a type of traditional Indian wife or be an individual of flesh and blood. Finally, Nirmala dies unsatisfied; unfulfilled. But Nayantara's heroines do not succumb to patriarchal pulls and pressures. Sahgal's radical feminist voice is more pronounced in her novel *Rich Like Us*. Referring to '*Sati*' system she says, "Those who perpetrated it must be hanged in the market place, or it would go on into the next century". (P 132)

Though a mediation for sexual psychological assertion of women dominates the writings of women novelists of the post colonial era, namely, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri. Nayantara Sahgal has voiced more aggressively and sensitively the problem of varied forms of encounters : cultural, political, historical, familial, ethnic and sexual. She has starkly underlined the need for the female to break free from the traditional Indian woman's role assigned by custom, culture, marriage and social taboos. What strikes most

especially in her early novels is the radical feminist propaganda which she propagates through her woman characters, namely, Maya in *A Time to Be Happy* Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* and Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*. Her women are 'new woman'. They are not like Premchand's Nirmala who suffers mutely the laceration of her juvenile dreams and desires. Her sufferings present a realistic picture of the patriarchal oppressions through cultural and religious conventions. 'Nirmala' presents in a manner hitherto unknown to Hindi novelists the articulation of inner conflict arising out of a struggle between convention and reality. Nirmala and Mansaram may not be able to challenge directly the oppressive social practices, the magnanimity of their suffering ending with their death only does shake off the firmly rooted patriarchal structure. Premchand believed that the days of oppressive male dominance are counted. The social structure in which oppression, suppression and depression of women is accepted as traditional, where a widower can marry any number of time and a widow is forced to die with her dead husband is sure to collapse. Nirmala's helplessness can be expressed in no better way than her consolation to Krishna, 'We are girls. Our home is nowhere.' Woman is always subordinated to man. Her roles as a daughter, as wife, even as a mother are subordinated to the will of man that rules the roost in our society Nirmala is a victim of the 'male prerogative in a degenerate form'.

Nayantara Sahgal portrays women with indomitable urge for freedom to choose including freedom to choose wrongly. A woman is a person in her own right and Sahgal is sure that she will adjust herself "physically and emotionally to the meaning of this freedom." The give and take of marital life can

function smoothly only if the partners develop consideration for each other. She wants to do away with the 'dead wood' of old ideas advocated by the decadent fast decaying bourgeois society. She regrets that "in this atomic age when monumental problems have been resolved by science, and research, the human relationship still seems largely unresearched." She stands for new marital morality. According to her, sexual morality is a convention and changes as all conventions do. Whatever happens in India in the near or far future, it is clear that the days of status quo are numbered. She writes in one of her articles in the *Sunday Standard* (March, 21, 1970) :

Greater personal freedom for women will come and wishing won't hold it back.... once they are educated and competently holding jobs, can the process stop there.

Nayantara Sahgal stands for humanism. Woman, to her, is not a mere toy, an object of lust, but man's equal and honoured partner in word and deed, as against the inhuman, traditional pastures, "Old impossible ideas," taboos and prejudices which, being out of date, must be cast aside like old clothes.

In the novel *This Time of Morning* one is struck by her accent on sex and extra marital relationships and the atmosphere of sexual freedom in general. If Nayantara's women characters have any passion, it is the longing to be free, freedom from all restraints in word and deed, being their monomania "Isn't silly not being allowed to do anything until one is married?" Nita grumbles, "I don't want to marry at all just yet." Marriage, she fears, would hedge her new-found liberty. Bursting with youth and frivolity, she dreads the prospects of her impending marriage. Furthermore Nayantara's young women drink and are sex starved.

This is radical in a country where even drinking is considered by the establishment as a symptom of moral decay. Uman, Arjan Mitra's wife is a terrible drunk and questions : "It always amazes me that that is taken for granted in a man is horrifying in woman." The question confounds us with the naked truth of double standard of morality practised even in the twentieth century- one for men and another for women.

Nayantara's world is largely a world of separations, betrayals, broken relations and promiscuity. Rashmi, Kalla's only child, is seen drinking and flirting at parties and even sharing "Interludes of closeness" including sex with Neil, Dhiraj's youthful daughter, Binny, "Ever busting out of her Kameez" is another Nita in the wings. The novelist records with sympathy that the moral order is changing not degenerating. "It had to be refashioned and protected in every age, and every generation found its own way to do this. Here, Sahgal is speaking through Mira. The Indian woman has been subjected to strict purdah and denied the freedom to be herself. Her attitude is in violent antagonism to the old doormat concept of man-woman relationship. The novelist thinks that there is so much that is out of date all-round in a country like ours and must go. She dislikes stupid adherence to the tradition of arranged marriage and favours a slight amendment in Hindu marriage law so as to facilitate separation. Neeta's typically western concept of "people living as they like" and "taking things as they come" is likely to be the new 'ism' in man-woman relationship, even in India.

Nayantara Sahgal's another greatly celebrated novel, *A Storm in Chandigarh* will retain its place as a major novel, a novel expressing her inmost thoughts on her recurrent theme of man-woman relations. The

main story concerns Inder and Saroj. Their marriage, though outwardly successful, is unhappy, reeling on the rock of temperamental incompatibilities and a radical divergence of marital ideas. Thoroughly convinced of male dominance, Inder deems love as a possession, sex, meaning home-keeping, children and their upbringing and the occasional parties. He does not like "women talk and behave like men". It annoys him that they behave "more like human beings and less like possessions." Vishal Dubey's critical analysis of women's position in India seems to echo the novelist's own vehement dislike for traditional image of woman as "a figure of humility, neck bent, eyes downcast, living flesh consigned to oblivion." The novelist ridicules the Indian tradition where women "belonged to their men by contract or blood". In the novel, Inder loves Saroj as if she were his slave and his possession. His conversation with Mara reveals his thinking :

'She belongs to me'

'Belongs to you ? So do your shoes.'

Even my shoes are special to me, because they are mine....

'They are special because they fit'

If they did not, you would throw them away....

A simple and straightforward confession of a past guilt by Saroj drives Inder in a mighty fit of anger-cum-jealousy. He is not prepared to forgive and forget, 'and the chasm opened by the confession never quite closes.' But tragically, Inder himself is guilty of the same sin. He tries to entangle Mara in the coils of his imperious and impatient sex, while at the same time brutally prosecutes Saroj for her pre-marital error. The novelist then shows that even in this century, men, like Inder, continue to believe in two codes, one for man and another for woman. The novelist is full of

sarcasm when she writes "If chastity is so important and so well worth preserving.... it would be easier to safeguard it by keeping men in seclusion, not women."

The novelist presents the marriage between Inder and Saroj as a marriage of "two different cultures" As Vishal puts it "Get two people so unlike together in marriage and every effort at growth on the part of one can look like an act of betrayal to the other." Inder belongs to the he-man school and believes in male-pre-dominance. So there is no question of any freedom or self-expression or growth for his wife. He loves Saroj but loves as if she were his slave. They have lived, loved, even processed and raised children, but there has been no real understanding between them. She is all the time afraid "of being misunderstood just of being oneself if and being punished for it." In the labour of living together, there had never been any intimacy" or "No solid ground" between them. The small islands of trust stay separated in a sea of suspicion. "Inder does not care what life or lives Saroj lives outside her common orbit. Saroj's remark, "I am alone even when Inder is here" speaks volumes of the extent of her distress.

The postmodern feminists emphasize valorization of present feminity and equality in gender relations. They insist on economic independence, reproductive freedom, and for 'freedom in the case of the middle class women from the confining role determined by the 19th century cult of domesticity. By the end of the 1960s, the women's liberation movement became radicalised enough to focus upon erazing sexual inequalities and challenge traditional cultural assumptions about women. Feminism fosters the idea of an egalitarian society where men and women are considered equal and the idea of male dominance is

discarded. Seen in this light, Nayantara Sahgals' novels reveal that she propagates radical feminism instead of dealing with political theme. I concur with M.K. Naik's observation :

"Nayantara Sahgal (1927) is usually regarded as an exponent of the political novel, but politics is only one of her two major concerns. She herself has declared that each of her novels 'more or less reflects the political era we are passing through' and daughter of Vijaylakshmi Pandit and niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nayatara naturally had an upbringing in which politics was inevitably a strong ambience; but along with the obvious political theme, her fiction is also preoccupied with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization." (P 239).

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Indian English Drama : A Survey

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Despite limitations and hindrances Indian English playwrights endeavoured to write plays. Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first play *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta* in 1831. It is a social play which presents the conflict between orthodoxy and new ideas which came from Western education. It exposes the hypocrisy and blackness of the influential segments in Hindu society. It is the earliest play on the East-West encounter theme which has been an important theme in the entire range of Indian English literature. From the viewpoint of technique and craftsmanship it is a crude presentation.

The big three in Indian English Drama : Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and H.N. Chattopadhyaya, known as the big three, made an abiding contribution to Indian English drama.

Rabindranath Tagore is a prolific dramatist who himself rendered some of his Bengali plays into English. All these appeared in *Collected Poems and Plays* (1936). Tagore's English plays are conspicuous for precision and well knit plot which is not found in Bengali originals. Tagore's better known plays *The Post Office* and *The King of the Dark Chamber* were translated respectively by Devabrata Mukherjee and K.C. Sen.

Tagore's plays may be divided thematically into two groups- thesis plays consisting of *Sanyasi*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja* and *Red Oleanders*; and secondly psychological plays comprising *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer*. *Sanyasi* propounds the

thesis about the celebration of life through love which emancipates human beings and enlarges their vision. *The Cycle Spring* is based on the idea that change is the law of nature and all changes should be joyously accepted. *Chitra* presents an illuminating vision of true love. *Sacrifice*, *Malini* and *Natir Puja* expose religious fanaticism. In *Red Oleanders* Tagore glorified human love and human values. The meaning of *Mukta-Dhara* is quite clear : human values are of great significance in life and to ignore this truth is to canter toward self-destruction.

Tagore's psychological plays are remarkable for insight into the feminine psyche. Queen Sumitra, Devayani, Kunti and the mother have been portrayed in vivid psychological terms in *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti* and *The Mother's Prayer*.

Tagore deftly uses either blank verse or poetic prose for his plays and he finds them suitable both for expressing his emotional intensity and spiritual zeal. We find both inner and external conflict in his plays. Sometimes there is conflicts between man and nature. In revealing this conflict Tagore uses broad, clear cut and detailed discussions which give his plays a didactic air and his dialogues an air of religious, moral and philosophical controversies. On such occasions Tagore the prophet and moralist gets the better of Tagore the poet, and artist. Sometimes his social awareness also comes to the surface. But his sincerity of expression, intensity of feeling and keen artistic quality save him from boredom and monotony.

Tagore's characters are used as his mouthpieces and they represent conflicting ideologies. They show little growth and development, but exhibit a remarkable

conflict of mind and soul. Tagore's characters in these plays have an allegorical or symbolical significance. His characters are archetypal in psychological plays. They also attain a universal significance. The psychological and spiritual delineation of his characters compensates for the loss of their free development.

Setting in Tagore's plays is remote and romantic. It is either puranic or legendary, feudal or symbolical. His dialogue is conspicuous for poetic flavour. Tagore's plays express typical Indian ethos and the language has been remarkably used to express Indian cultural and spiritual background.

Tagore paid much attention to the stagecraft also. He himself was an actor, producer and playwright. He realised the limitations and the needs of all the aspects of dramatic art and took great interest in costume, stage and other accessories.

Sri Aurobindo wrote plays in English and successfully imitated the blank verse drama of the Elizabethans. He wrote five complete and six incomplete poetic plays between 1891 and 1916. During his student days in England he wrote *The Witch of Ilini* *Drama of the Woodlands* (1891) and *Achab and Esar*, *The Viziers of Bassora : A Dramatic Romance*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Rodogune* and *three fregmens- The Maid in the Mill : Love Shuffles the Cards*, *The House of Brut* and *The Birth of Sin* belong to the Baroda period (1893-1906). *Prince of Edur*, *Eric* and *Vasavadutta* were written in 1912 and 1916. All the full length five act plays in blank verse have a typical Elizabethan cast. In spite of the variety of setting, theme and characterisation all plays of Sri Aurobindo "are steeped in poetry and romance and prophecy" (Iyengar, 154) spirit and flavour of the

distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti.

Sri Aurobindo's dramatic art has been crippled by profuse Elizabethan influence and in his plays he does not reveal the same originality both in thought and craftsmanship as in his poetry. Commenting on the characteristics of Sri Aurobindo's plays M.K. Naik writes :

"An interesting feature of Sri Aurobindo's plays is their variety of period and locale ranging from ancient Greek times to medieval India and covering diverse lands including Iraq, Syria, India, Spain, Britain and Norway. The two characteristic Aurobindonian themes in the plays are the idea of human evolution in 'Perseus the Deliverer' and love as a benevolent force destroying evil and conflict and making for harmony and peace in *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Prince of Edur*, *Eric* and *Vasavadutta*." (Naik, 105)

Both as a poet and playwright H.N. Chattopadhyaya is noticeable for his fecundity and versatility. *Five Plays* (1937) has a Galsworthian flair for social awareness and realism. Dialogue is written in biting prose. *The Parrot* and *The Window* reveal the sad predicament of the poor. In *The Sentry's Lantern* the dramatist symbolically expresses the hope of the dawn of a new era for the poor. The worker says : "The Revolution will come- the Revolution will come - red like this dawn. Red like this dawn." (Iyengar, 234) *The Coffin* satirises the imaginary and fantastic world of the bourgeois artist. *The Evening Lamp* is dedicated "to those who may be able to light it towards the New Dawn of Realism." (Iyengar otd, 234) All these plays have a purpose and are suffused with realism which is seldom found in Indian English dramatic writing.

Besides *Five Plays*, Chattopadhyaya wrote *The Sleeper Awakened* which is a satirical exposition of the evils of modern civilisation. *The Saint : A Farce* is a satire on religious hypocrisy, *Kannappan* or *Hunter of Kalahasti* is a lyric play on the theme of the right of a lowly hunter to enter a temple and *Siddharta : Man of Peace* is a play in eight acts on the life of Lord Buddha. Chattopadhyaya's plays, although distinguished for realism are poor in characterisation and craftsmanship. He fails to portray highly individualised characters.

A.S.P. Ayyar (1899-1963) wrote plays on social and reformistic themes. *In the Clutch of the Devil*, *Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity*, *Sita's Choice and Other Plays* and *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays* the prose medium is effectively handled – *Sita's Choice* is based on the theme of remarriage of a widow. In Ayyar's plays the purpose is more important than craftsmanship and plot and characterisation is subordinated to it.

T.P. Kailasam (1884-1946) wrote both in Kannada and English. His plays are based on Puranic themes which he interpreted in the modern context. *The Burden* and *Flufliment* published in 1933, are poignant one act plays in prose. The former is based on an episode from the *Ramayana* and the latter is based on the life of Ekalavya. It is a powerful tragedy which may be considered as the finest specimen of Kailasam's dramatic art. *A Monologue : Don't Cry* depicts the endless sorrows of a woman's life. *Karna* or *the Brahmin's Curse* is a powerful tragedy. It is the *Mahabharata* in miniature. It also reveals the influence of the *Gita*. Kailasam's characters have 'a touch of iconoclasm, but actually the idealism is deeper than iconoclasm.' (Iyengar 238) He is a staunch humanist and glorifies

the worth of the underdog.

Bharti Sarabhai wrote two plays *The Well of the People* and *Two Women* which evince the influence of Gandhian thought. *The Well of the People* is a realistic play which describes the miserable plight of a widow. Its plot is based on a story which appeared in Mahatma Gandhi's *Harijan*. *Two Women* is a prose drama packed with thought and deep feelings. It highlights the conflict and tension caused by East-West encounter.

J.M. Lobo Prabhu's plays are contained in *Collected Plays*. *Apes in the Parlour* is a biting skit on sophisticated life. *The Family Case*, which is melodramatic in character, reveals the sad plight of a widowed sister in a joint family. *Flags of the Heart* is a sentimental presentation of love thwarted by caste. As a playwright Lobo Prabhu writes dialogue with ease and spontaneity, he can devise dramatic situations and can employ a style which is characterised by poeticism and play upon words. He failed to create life like characters and his denouements are seldom effective and convincing.

G.V. Desani's *Hali* (1950) is the finest poetic play of this period. T.S. Eliot praised it as poetry rather as drama. It is an autobiographical play, a revelation of personal tragedy, a serious love affair. It vividly reveals "Hali's confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of phenomenal world, his communion with Love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place." (Iyengar, 243) *Hali* is a symbolical and existential play which was successfully staged at the Watergate Theatre, London as well as in India.

P.A. Krishnaswamy's *The Flute of Krishna* (1950) is another poetic play which is commendable for the flight

of fancy and the revelation that a devotee's faith never goes in vain.

Asif Currimbhoy (1928) – is the most prolific Indian English playwright who has genuine feeling for drama and an outstanding sensitivity to theatrical value. He has published about thirty plays, the first of them being *The Tourist Mecca*. He has written plays on a wide range and variety of subjects – history, current politics, social and economic problems, the East-West encounter, psychological conflicts, philosophy, religion and art.

Political events greatly attracted his attention. The major political events which attracted his attention are partition and its consequences in *The Captives*, the liberation of Goa from Portuguese domination in *Goa*, India freedom movement in *An Experiment in Truth*, the naxalite movement in *Inquilab*, the Bangla Desh war in *The Refugee* and student unrest in Gujarat in *The Dissident M.L.A. The Doldrummers* and the *Miracle Seed* deal with social problems. *The Doldrummers* vividly portrays a debauched and cynical group of Anglo-Indians. The East-West encounter is the theme of *The Tourist Mecca*, *The Hungry Ones* and *Darjeeling Tea*. *The Clock* and *The Dumb Dancer* are psychological plays. *Om*, a play in three acts, describes the evolution of Hindu religion.

Pratap Sahrma (1940) is a skilled craftsman like Asif Currimbhoy. His two plays *A Touch of Brightness* and *The Professor Has a Warcry* are not only actable but are also noticeable for local colour and criticism of social hypocrisy. *A Touch of Brightness* is a realistic picture of the redlight district in Bombay and a vivid exposition of religious hypocrisy. *The Professor Has a Warcry* is a mixture of melodrama and tragedy. It also deals with the problem of sex and rape.

Gieve Patel's *Princes* deals with the conflict over the possession of a child who becomes an invalid and later dies between two Parsi families. A very important feature of the play is the modified English speech which Gieve Patel uses for the dialogue to give it a Parsi tang. Extracts from his second play *Savaksa* appeared in *The Indian Express*, 28th Feb., 1982.

Lakhan Deb has written three plays-*Tiger Claw*, *Vivekanand* and *Murder At the Prayer Meeting* are chronicle plays. The former deals with the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji and the latter deals with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi. He adroitly employs blank verse but his rhymed verse is crude. *Murder At the Prayer Meeting* is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Nissim Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) includes *Nalini : A Comedy*, *Marriage Poem : A Tragi-Comedy* and *The Sleepwalkers : An Indo-American Farce*. these plays are noticeable for considerable imagination, bold thematic experiments, masterly use of irony and fantasy. *Son of Deprivation*, a short play, also appeared in 1969.

Gurucharan Das' *Larins Sahib* (1970), a play in three acts, deals with nineteenth century colonial India. It graphically deals with the time of Henry Lawrence who was appointed the East India Company's resident in the court of Ranjit Singh's twelve year old son, Dalip Singh. It is a successful historical play. Das effectively and convincingly creates the atmosphere of colonial days in Punjab, Das's *Mira* (1971) vividly presents Mira's selfless God-love with all the sophistication of contemporary theatre. It was successfully produced as ballet in New York and as a play in Bombay. *Jakhoo Villa* deals with the theme of

decadence in modern Hindu family in Simla.

Girish Karnad (1938), actor and film director, is originally a Kannada dramatist who wrote *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Tale Danda*, *Naga Mandala*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *The Dreams of Tipul Sultan*, *Bali* and *The Wedding Album*. He successfully translated most of his plays from Kannada into English. *Tughlaq* is a historical play which deals with life and times of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq of the fourteenth century India. Karnad deviates from history when it is inevitable from the artistic viewpoint. It is a play based on opposites, *Hayavadana* is based on the Kathasaritsagar tale which Thomas Mann used for his novel *The Transposed Heads*. It is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs. Thus all the plays of Girish Karnad are conspicuous for the deft employment of irony and crisp dialogue.

M. V. Rama Sharma's *Collected Plays* (1982) is a collection of eleven plays on a wide variety of themes. *Youth and Crabbed Age*, *Like to like* and *This Busy World* were written under G.B. Shaw's influence. *Shakuntala*, *Marpessa* and *Urvashi* are plays based on the theme of love. *Towards Marriage* and *The Carnival* are both realistic and satirical. *The Mahatma* (1979) highlights the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi.

P.A. Krishnaswami's *The Flute of Krishna* (1950) is a love play. M. Krishnamuri's *The Cloth of Gold* (1951) is a dance drama set in feudal times. Uma Maheswar's *Buddha* and *Sita in her Sorrows*, V. N. Bhushan's *Samyukta* and *Anklet Bells*, Manjeri Isvaran's *Hira Bai* and *Yama* and *Yami* are some important plays. K.S.R. Sastri's *Droupadi* is an interesting retelling of the *Mahabharata* story, D.M. Borgankar's *Image Breakers* is a problem play on the institution of marriage.

Krishna Gorowara is a playwright with great promise. His numerous plays have appeared in journals and magazines. He has an inborn talent for comedy, satire and irony. He ironically exposes urban sophistication in *The Way Up*, *And Mourning Do We Go*, *Call a Day*, *Refineries Unlimited* and *Indo Anglians in Anglia*.

Prithvi Nandy's *Rites For Plebeian Statue*, Shree Devi Singh's *The Purple Braided People*, P.S. Gokak's *The Goddess Speaks*, K. Nagarjan's *Chidambaram : A Chronicle Play*, M.D. Mehwani's *Deep Roots*, Shiva K. Kumar's historical play *Line of Mars*, Syed Amaruddin's *The King Who Sold His Wife*, Ahmad Akhtar's *Anarkali*, K.S. Kuggalis *To Face a Widow : Six Radio Plays* and Masti Venkatesa Iyenger's *Kailidasa* deserve a place in Indian English drama.

Despite limitations and hindrances Indian English Drama has come to maturity. Various dramatic genres- tragedy, comedy, farce, historical play, problem play, poetic drama and mythological plays- have been employed successfully. Short plays and one act plays of varying quality appear in journals and magazines. Drama has now become a fruitfully cultivated field in Indian English literature.

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BASTAR

- **Stephen Gill**

Reghu went to Bastar with Vice Chancellor Dwindra from Raipur. It was a pleasant six-hour drive, stopping at a variety of places, starting with the new capital of Chhattisgarh and then to its latest university area, where Vice Chancellor Dwindra had bought a piece of land to settle after his retirement.

From the smooth-running car, Reghu perceived a panoramic view, where the bones of the five thousand-year old civilization were buried. At some places there were dense jungles and at some barren land or hills covered with wildness. He also saw lonely and gorgeous temples and sleepy villages. The tapestry of some of them stretched into the peaceful blue sky. It was an ideal surrounding for the ideal love of Sita and the free spirit of Surpnakha. He could listen to the song of silence that was heard more meaningfully by them and the sage Valmiki in the mythological age.

He closed his eyes for a moment thinking of the Nexalites but the highway was alive with the traffic to discourage any human from suffocating it. This was the Nexalite territory where the deposits of ores could make Bastar among the richest nations. He thought of schools and health centres and if they would reach here before industrialists could. He had heard that this territory with its hills and jungles was also infested with gun-wielding victims who had previously suffered atrocities but now were here with their determination for vengeance. The assassination of the last ruler had strengthened their conviction that the independence of India had also brought independence

for corruption to flourish in some circles of the establishment. Reghu threw a glance at Vice Chancellor Dwindra. He was dozing but Reghu's imagination was awakening.

It was around midnight when they arrived at Vice Chancellor Dwindra's residence, where they had supper and then the driver took Reghu to the hotel where he stayed for two nights. The hotel in Jagdalpur was reasonably quiet and clean, but provided vegetarian foods that were neither spicy nor hot. To Reghu it was not right when Canadians said that Indian food was spicy.

It was afternoon. After his lecture at the university, a car dropped Reghu at his hotel. He went out into the city of Jagdalpur for the type of food he preferred. He thought any restaurant that could make vegetarian food could also make it spicy. After having tea and a Samoa at a snack shop he went back to his hotel. He was tired because his hunt for a restaurant provided him an hour's walk that he did not want to give up even when he was on literary tours.

When Reghu entered his room, an employee came and said, "Sir, two persons want to see you."

"Ask them to come tomorrow at the same time." Suddenly Reghu realized that the employee perhaps was not able to communicate in proper English. He inquired,

"Where are they?"

"Sir, both are downstairs. Here is a note they have sent." The note was in good English. They were teachers at a college. It was obvious their education was much better than the education of an average Chhattisgarian. Though he wanted to rest for a while, Reghu said,

“Send them in if they are here.”

As the servant was about to leave, Reghu asked, “Please send also tea.” Actually Reghu wanted tea also for himself because tea at the restaurant was not enjoyable. He asked,

“Do you know how to make Indian tea?”

“Yes, we know. We produce tea locally. We have different types of Chhattisgarian tea. ”

“I know Chhattisgarh has gardens where tea plants are grown and Jashpur is one of them. I am not talking of these plants. Take a little more than the regular amount of tea and boil it in half milk and half water till the content is reduced to nearly half. Mix ginger and two spoons of brown sugar before boiling the water. I would like to have three cups of that tea for me and two cups for each guest. And also something spicy if you have it.” Reghu repeated his request two or three times in different combinations to make the employee understand what he meant.

“I know sir, what you mean.”

As he left, Reghu began to read their note again. As he was going over it, paying attention to each word, he heard a knock. The pair was healthier than the typical Chhattisgarians he had seen. Not only were they impressively built, but also impressive in their English and manners.

During the conversation, they told Reghu that they could arrange anything for him, except money. They were straightforward and their expression was clear and friendly.

Reghu affirmed he did not want money-- all he wanted was to meet the Adivasi to know their culture. That evening he had almost a primal urge to enjoy non-vegetarian hot and spicy food. He told them that

he liked the hotel and would like to extend his stay to four weeks to study Bastar for his writing. Both were pleased to help him.

As Reghu had been assured, the food came within thirty minutes after they left. The food was fresh. The food that he savoured like fine whisky was certainly prepared with the Bastaran warmth. As he stretched out on the bed after enjoying the food, Dr. Baghel, a teacher from the university, arrived. Introducing himself he said,

“I have come to share something about Bastar. I am from a community of the Adivasi,” I have a doctorate in the history of Bastar. The Aboriginal or the Adivasi population of India is greater than the total population of France, even of Britain. Indian languages are indebted to Adivasi languages. Moreover, their knowledge of the medicinal plants and herbs has played a strong role in deepening the knowledge of India’s medical system, Ayurveda. In terms of democracy, the local governments of India have incorporated some Adivasi political practices. Adivasi music, dance and folklore have enriched the cultural life of India,” Dr. Baghel proudly stated.

“I want to know the mythological background of Bastar, going back to the days of Rama when he was exiled and waged war with Ravana over his wife, Sita. I know Chhattisgarh was called Dandakaranya and also Dakshin Kosala in those days and that this present state of Bastar was established by Annama Deva from Andhra Pradesh. His dynasty worshipped the goddess Danteswari whose temple is still at Dantewada. But I want to know about Bastar,” Reghu asked.

“The last ruler of Bastar was assassinated along with a number of tribal people by a special force from Delhi right here in his palace. He was popular among the Adivasi and he supported their cause for the

preservation of their culture. His assassination scared the tribal people. Many of them fled to other provinces. This exodus has not ceased. There is also immigration from the north and serious attempts have been made to cut trees and industrialize Bastar. This trend has upset the life pattern of the Aborigines and has reduced their population.” Dr. Baghel became quiet while feeling uncomfortable because of his tall and heavy body in that small chair. While he was shifting his position, Reghu interrupted,

“I heard another story. Rajneesh or Osho, called Bhagwan by his followers, had roots in Chhattisgarh. He said in one of his talks that he was a good friend of the last ruler of Bastar and enjoyed the privilege of staying at any of his palaces. You know Rajneesh for his weird life and teachings. He said that the chief minister of Chhattisgarh did not approve of their association. He asked the ruler to stop his association with Rajneesh. Because of his refusal, he was killed. Rajneesh says the chief minister was behind that plot.

“I also learned that the last ruler wandered in the deep woods for self-discovery or enlightenment. During the days of his wandering in search of enlightenment he must have encountered Rajneesh, who frequented this area to learn from the Adivasi.” Reghu said.

Dr. Baghel asked, “Rajneesh had lived in the USA for some years. His followers were affluent people from all over the world. Why did Rajneesh go there?”

“Rajneesh bought a ranch in remote eastern Oregon in the US to preach enlightenment,” Reghu was quick to say.

“What is enlightenment? Was he enlightened?”

“Enlightenment is not possible to define and describe in words as music and thirst cannot. Words

are just symbols. Enlightenment is an experience that leads to mental, physical and emotional wellness and understanding of one’s purpose in life through the stillness of the conscious mind to be connected with the god within. It awakens the inner self to view everything in the light that is the reflection of Divinity. Enlightenment is the egoless spiritual awakening. In other words, this awakening is nature purified-- a state of more peace, happiness and love, transcending the barriers of ego that is the self.

“At his Ashram in Pune, plutocrats blessed Rajneesh with bonanzas. This solidified his self-confidence. His Ashram got involved with illicit activities. The tax-exempt status of his foundation was revoked. He owed millions of dollars to the Indian government and his problems with the city mounted. He was cracked down for tax fraud and other unlawful operations. His personal secretary bought a ranch in Oregon to carry out those operations on a massive scale without disturbing the neighbours. With failing health due to diabetes, allergies and clashes with the law, he left India.

“Rajneesh preached enlightenment through sexual promiscuity that he categorized as free love. He marketed his product with the label of the peace that brings more success and makes death easy to embrace after having fulfilled the hidden desires. His ranch began to be pestered with arson, manipulation of the country’s laws, smuggling, the use of biological terrorism, conspiracies to commit murders, burglary, wiretapping and more in the name of a religious utopia. He had the most expensive watches studded with diamonds, jewellery, fleets of Rolls-Royces and private jets while his followers on the commune worked for twelve hours a day without pay.”

“Where his money came from?” Dr. Baghel asked.

“The participants in his orgies were starved house wives and business magnets. He used to advise participating women to be sterilized and abort pregnancies. He did not understand the joy that a new born brings to parents. Most members of his cult suffered from transmittable diseases. And you know where he learnt all these to buy his costly toys?”

“Where?” Dr. Baghel asked with his eyes wide open.

“From the living university of the Gonds.” Reghu said.

“You mean he learnt from Bastar?”

“Yes, from the Ghotul of the Gonds. Rajneesh learnt from Ghotuls to make money. You know much more than I do about the Ghotul of Bastar. Tell me more,” Reghu asked.

“According to a legend, the god Lingo Pen founded the Ghotul, a living university of the Gonds for unmarried boys and girls to mix freely. A Ghotul is normally outside the village. There are no text books and tests here. Married women are not allowed to get in though married men are sometimes invited by their friends to attend social gatherings. A girl enjoys freedom to indulge in premarital sex and to select her life partner. She is free to get a divorce, if she feels she is improperly treated.

“God Lingo Pen, a musician, was the first to teach the art of drumming. The Gonds of Bastar consider a good drummer to be a good lover. Since Lingo Pen is the deity of love, no ghost or witch can dare to enter the environment of the Ghotul and the relations of boys and girls are free from sin. Every one gets a chance to pair off in the evening. Their leaders supervise to see that all are treated fairly.

“In some Ghotuls only the serious couples can go together for the night and in some they are encouraged to keep changing their partners. Due to these practices in Ghotul, it is said that crimes due to jealousy do not happen among the Gonds. On the other hand, most of the crimes due to extra marital relationships take place among the Adivasi tribe of the Bhils.”

Reghu said, “You mean that a Ghotul is a dormitory for the Gonds of Bastar where unmarried boys and girls establish their relationships that are acceptable to their society.”

“Ghotul is a place for boys and girls to learn community love to overcome their feelings of possessiveness, jealousies and attachments. Tribal music, dance and songs shape the development of their lives. They derive their spiritual joy from cultural activities that are vibrant in Ghotuls and which are governed by specific regulations to enrich the culture. Young ones learn about life within the Ghotul. Both genders grow up in harmony here.

“Here the boys and girls grow their own vegetables and learn to play music and dance. They learn also about cleanliness, hard work, and discipline, to respect their elders, practice hospitality and the value of unity. In other words, it is a cultural and a recreational centre. ” Dr. Baghel said.

Reghu added, “And Rajneesh knew at least two languages of the local Adivasi. He could move around easily among the Gonds.

After a pause for a minute, Dr. Baghel asked, “Tell me something more about Rajneesh.”

“Rajneesh was terribly lonely and empty from within. He needed toys to play with as a child does. He was critical of the teachings of Christ, not realizing that Christ had emptied himself for others. Rajneesh

was filling his emptiness with the imitations of love and empathy. Based on my studies I can affirm that Rajneesh suffered from diabetes, insomnia and other ailments. He was addicted to drugs, particularly to Valium. Those who use heavy doses of Valium develop paranoia. He took sixty milligrams of Valium a day and inhaled nitrous oxide. Valium causes delusions, outbursts of anger, trouble in sleeping, unexplained tiredness and excessive distrust of others. He had all these symptoms of a non-enlightened teacher. He used to combine Valium with other drugs which resulted in incoherence in his conversations. He started imagining that there were plots to kill or poison him. He publicly advised people to assassinate Mikhail Gorbachev, a Nobel Laureate, because Gorbachev was moving the USSR towards capitalism, instead of spiritual communism. He also imagined that the last ruler of Bastar was killed on the advice of the chief minister because of his friendship with the ruler. He also imagined that the government of the United States had poisoned him. He began to compare his sufferings with the sufferings of Christ.

“It seems Rajneesh was terribly lonely,” Dr. Baghel commented.

“He wanted to establish a loveless society because he himself was loveless. His Ashram had children like in a herd. He used to say that a child should not know his or her real father. He also used to say that the mother is the cause of children’s neuroses. He produced a loveless philosophy because he was a product of a motherless environment during his childhood and even later. A mother is her child’s intimate and reliable friend. Her unconditional love is non-ending. Without love life is empty. Research has shown that early maternal support has a compelling impact on the development of the brain cells that control the ability to deal with stress and stress

increases the risk of diabetes.

“Rajneesh never had the real love of a woman. He did not love any either. All his relationships were basically business like. Not only his personal life but even his convictions were phoney. The emptiness of his convictions is clear from the fact he had softness for Hitler and negative attitude towards Mahatma Gandhi. He adored war because it brings benefits. He practised Tantra that permits mating even with one’s own children. He rationalized his lies with the support of the myths of Tantra. He grew without parents even though they were alive. The absence of maternal love made his life empty.

“I believe a human is born to love and to receive love. Life without love is an empty vessel. Mother’s love starts filling this vessel. Its emptiness becomes intolerably painful. To subside this intolerable pain humans often find substitutes in drugs, violence, money, promiscuity and other forms. Some even commit suicide. These substitutes are imitations and no amount of these imitations can fill the empty vessel. The source of genuine love is the presence of the mother in childhood. Rajneesh lacked this insatiable passion that nurtured emptiness in him. To fill that emptiness, he invited his mother late in his life to join his commune. But this is not the same as the closeness of mother during childhood.

“Because Rajneesh had nothing inside to rely on, he resorted to narcotics. The persons who practise free love usually catch AIDS. Most of the members of his inner circle had contagious diseases. Some left him one after the other and some of them were convicted and jailed. An overdose of Valium hastened his death by heart failure, if not by AIDS. Rajneesh had ties with Chhattisgarh.” Reghu added.

Dr. Baghel asked, “You have mentioned Tantra.

What is it all about?"

"Tantra is a Sanskrit word that means to weave together. Tantra appeared in the fifth-century AD in India to promote enlightenment through carnal rituals. Tantra is rebellion against the organized religious belief in celibacy. It is a way to achieve intimacy through eroticism. Dr. Jha who teaches archeology at Kaligarh University told me that several historical temples around Chhattisgarh and elsewhere had erotic depictions at the important portals of the temples.

The displays of erotic depictions at the entrances to historical temples were to remind worshippers of the divine purpose. What would happen if all the birds, if the animals, if the sea creatures and all the humans stop procreating? The remarkable erotic illustrations are a reminder to those who declare the ideology of celibacy as a direction to salvation.

"Rajneesh stretched out the ideology of the falsehood of his type of Tantra to put a lid on his emptiness to simmer gently. He staged rituals at his Ashram to attract the affluent segment to act out their fantasies in privacy. That is where he made his money to buy his expensive toys."

"Sir, those orgies were not forced." Dr. Baghel said.

"To convince lonely, starved and disturbed women with the force of logic to participate in orgies to achieve a morsel of peace is a delicious evil. To convince a pretty woman in a vulnerable situation to abandon her husband and children and join his commune, instead of finding ways to patch up their differences, is the sadistic wickedness of the devil. To use reasoning cunningly in defenseless conditions of wives to collect Rolls Royces to drive each day of a different colour and to have enough of them to be in the Guinness

Book of World Records is cold-blooded depravity that cannot be eased by any means. To break the laws of a country again and again to feed the monster of the fragile ego is the vicious habitual felony. A supreme soul has rightly said that 'A man does not live by bread alone.'" Reghu was calm and also tried to be forceful.

Dr. Baghel said, "Let us come back to Bastar. This culture of the Adivasi is more than five thousand years old. Almost half of Bastar is covered with forests. The most important event is its Dussehra Festival, which is not celebrated to welcome the return of Rama, as it is celebrated in the north of India. Dussehra is celebrated in Bastar to honour Ma Danteswari, who was and still is the goddess of the royal family and the royal family is from the Kakatiya dynasty."

"Where is the Kakatiya dynasty from?" Reghu was inquisitive.

"From Waranangal in modern Madhya Pradesh. The dynasty had its own temple in Waranangal that was ruined by Muslim rulers, but it is still there as a relic of peerless beauty. The Dussehra Festival in Bastar has several tribal traditions incorporated into it. The king, who is also the head priest of Ma Danteswari, abdicates his throne for ten days to worship her to receive guidance for his rule."

"Who is Ma?" Reghu asked.

"Goddess Danteswari is the mother of Bastarans. Ma stands for mother in Hindi," Dr. Baghel replied.

"Tell me something about Ravana because he had connections here," Reghu asked.

"Ravana's effigy is not burnt here as it is burnt in the north every year on Dussehra. Ravana was a scholar and a follower of Buddha. Some offer puja or special prayers to Ravana as they do to other deities.

He is also worshipped in Indore and there is Valmiki Samaj in other parts who worship also Ravana.

“On Dussehra, a Rath Yatra, you may call it a chariot trip, is taken out. This hand-made chariot has eight wheels and weighs about thirty tons, constructed without any machine. Around ten thousand clay lamps, called deepak in Hindi, decorate the path of the chariot. It is an eye-catching sight that pulsates with drums, dances and colourful umbrellas. The main purpose is to celebrate Mother Danteswari. Rama, an Aryan king, has nothing to do with Dussehra here. Rama was exiled for fourteen years by his father because his step-mother wanted her own son to be enthroned. See how mothers play good or bad roles in children’s future. We have a benign mother in the profile of Ma Danteswari.” Dr. Baghel said.

“How about Surpnakha? Was she from here?”

“As you know, Surpnakha was the sister of Ravana, the king of Sri Lanka. The whole story of Ramayana is about the war between the Aryans and Aborigines as there were battles between the white, new comers, and the Aborigines, the first nations in Canada. There were agreements between them in Canada. Aborigines were settled in reserved areas. In India, there were agreements with the invading Aryans in some belts and in some belts the Adivasi were pushed to the jungles and hills. They are living there even today. Some of them have adopted the Aryans customs as in Canada some First Nations people have married whites. Their children are called Metis.

“Aborigines were considered as inhuman. Aryans planned to destroy the culture of the Adivasi in the guise of the golden deer of prosperity. To destroy the culture of Sri Lanka, the story of Sita was fabricated to legitimize the invasion of Rama or Aryans. Now they

are fabricating the fable of progress to rob the bank of the Adivasi. This bank is their forest. Sita was not abducted as it is clear from the folklore of some tribes. She went with Ravana willingly. Surpnakha is the free spirit of the Adivasi. The forest and the land are the incarnate forms of Ma Danteswari for them.

“How was Ravana’s sister Surpnakha related to Bastar?”

“Bastar is a district of Chhattisgarh and Chhattisgarh was Dakshin Kosla. Ratanapur was a part of Dakshin Kosala. Surpnakha was married to Kapardidev, a ruler of Ratanapur. Perhaps he was killed later by Ravana over some family matter. After her husband’s death she often came here to find her relatives. It was during those visits, she came across Rama and his step brother Lakshman. Rama’s step brother chopped off her nose and ears,” Dr. Baghel said.

“Chopping off the nose and ears is a devastating assault, as is acid-throwing. Once in a while there is an unprecedented outcry on Indian streets against the violence of acid-throwing. Let me say only the form has changed to demonstrate masculinity. A number of women suffer and are disfigured every year by acid-throwing.” Reghu’s condemnation of the incident was obvious.

“This disgraceful deed of chopping off the nose and ear happened because Surpnakha made a marriage proposal. Rama and Lakshman did not tell her they were married. There were other ways for those brave Aryan brothers to intervene instead of exhibiting their masculinity by cutting off the nose and ears of a female guest. There was no attack by Surpnakha. Some groups in Sri Lanka do not believe that Ravana had abducted Sita. Her chastity was proven. Some families in Sri Lanka give the name

Ravana to their sons. She was beautiful and related to royal families. She was certainly more beautiful than Sita was. This is the repetition of the story of Ekalavya, who was an Adivasi and a much better archer than Arjuna, an Aryan disciple of Guru Dronacharya. They cut off his thumb to minimize his abilities to excel in martial arts. He was alone when he was attacked. Don't forget that in the entire Ramayana not even a single Aryan is killed. The Adivasi are portrayed as rakshas, in other words, as savages. Krishna of Mahabharata is shown as killed by a Bhil Jarathu, an Adivasi, to show that the Adivasi are cruel. The Adivasi are portrayed as demons and nagas and nagas mean serpents. Perhaps Ravana belonged to the tribe of Gonds who hold him in very high esteem.

“Just think of Ramayana. Rama goes everywhere in Sri Lanka looking for Ravana, though he knew Ravana. He had met him at the Swayambara of Sita. Yet he kept searching for him because his aim was to know the tapestry of Sri Lanka in order to destroy it. I believe that the real hero of Ramayana is not Rama; it is Ravana. Hero does not die and Ravana does not die in the epic. The prejudice of the Aryans against the Adivasi is still prevalent and it is obvious when it is propagated that the Adivasi never fought against the British for the freedom of India. In the Adivasi songs and tales there are several heroes who fought against the British. Even the Hindus admit it but when it comes to text books these heroes are neglected.

“In any case, I would like to know your assessment of Surpnakha for expressing her desire to marry Rama.” Dr. Baghel asked.

Reghu mused for a while and then said, “Feminist movements are also for self-expression and self-expression is the right of every human and women are human. A liberated woman rejects the idea of

passivity as a myth. Surpnakha had the courage to express her proposal for marriage for which she was disgraced. To me Surpnakha is a sympathetic character who was ahead of her times. She is a prototype of a liberated woman. I appreciate her courage for self-expression.

“The waterfalls, flowers, trees, wild animals, hills and other objects of nature had penetrated into Surpnakha's psyche, transforming her into one of them. She was spontaneous like her natural surroundings.

“Human society is driven by minds, fears and inflated egos. The vessels of passion and fulfilment are covered with the toys that money and reputation can buy, which Rajneesh had. It is important to follow the heart and the heart is free and wild like the jungles of Dakshin Kosala. Without the heart a human is a lost thing. The hearts of the industrialists and the politics of the elite are dreary as was the heart of Rajneesh, whose inside was a disused street.

“I believe Surpnakha was as appealing as her mother was. She was named Minakshi at birth, meaning fish-eyed. She had royal blood and married into a royal family. She was a widow when she met Rama and his brother Lakshman. Both the brothers made fun of her when she made a marriage proposal to Rama. That was like playing ping-pong with her feelings. It is neither a sin nor a crime to express oneself. Surpnakha was badly wronged for doing no wrong.”

Dr. Baghel replied, “According to Valmiki, Surpnakha was a rakshas— inhuman.”

“I would like to say”, Reghu answered, “A tree is known by its fruit. A person should be judged by his or her actions. There is nothing in the actions of

Surpnakha that may suggest she was inhuman. On the other hand, she proved that she was a human and full of love and was not revengeful. It is clear when she asks her brother Khara not to kill Rama or Lakshman. In today's democratic societies, including India, it would be a crime to chop off anyone's nose and ears. It is a cruel assault. " Reghu was somewhat assertive.

"Let us talk more about the Gonds," Opening a window of the room where they were sitting, Dr. Baghel paused for a while looking outside at the gathering clouds before saying, "This area has been ruled by the dynasties that claim to have originated from the sun. This area has also been ruled by the dynasties that claim to have originated from the moon and some even from serpents. This area has also been ruled by Ravana through his brother, Khara, and his sister, Surpnakha. Ravana is believed to have had ten heads and a flying machine which he used to carry Sita. That machine did not need any petrol or electric power to run. This area is known for these and other mind-boggling tales. This area is also known for witchcraft. In Valmiki's Ramayana, the area of Chhattisgarh and its bordering towns are mentioned as Dandakaranya. The word Danda refers to punishment.

"Let us also talk about the origin of Bastar, " Reghu suggested.

"The history of Chhattisgarh is not clear because of its existence since the hoary past. The dynasties that ruled here claimed their mysterious origins and their fabrics had been bloodied with family feuds. In the fourteenth century the state of Bastar was founded by Annama Deva who hailed from Andhra Pradesh. His brother Pratapa Rudra, ruled Andhra. Annama Deva made Jagdalpur the capital of his kingdom. It is situated on the bank of the Indravati River. Bastar

was divided into two kingdoms in the 15th century due to family jealousies. Its last ruler was popular with the tribal population. As we have discussed before, he was assassinated by the establishment at his own palace along with several of his faithful people.

"The region of Bastar has produced sages and is still producing sages. The influence of the sages who preached tolerance has always been strong here. Valmiki, who wrote The Ramayana, had his cottage around here. " Dr. Baghel said.

Reghu was quick to add, "I call these sages spiritual physicians. The monastic calm and the rugged beauty of Bastar's forests are conducive for producing these spiritual physicians. I believe that its last ruler wanted to be one of these spiritual physicians."

"Yes he did. For self-discovery, he abdicated his throne to wander in the forest for enlightenment," Dr. Baghel said.

"But I often wonder...,"

"What is it that you wonder?" Dr. Baghel asked with an inquisitive expression.

"The last ruler of Bastar is compared with Buddha who left his kingdom to become a beggar in search of the key to open the vault of the secrets of human sufferings. Buddha did find this key while he was meditating under a tree in Bihar, not far from here. After that he became an enlightened guru and started preaching his gospel.

"What was the mission for the renunciation of the last ruler of Bastar? Where did he go, whom did he meet in his wanderings, did he find a spiritual teacher, how did he live in the jungles and who fed him? What is it that he had discovered or he came

back to serve his people when he was half through his journey of self-discovery. The question that comes to my mind is if he had bodyguards around him when he was assassinated and if his people tried to capture any of his assassins? “Reghu asked.

“You will get these answers in your next visit,” was Dr. Bagel’s short reply. Let me continue. I would like to add that the area of Bastar is greater than the province of Kerala, greater than even Belgium and Israel. Because of its primitive culture, the area is exotic.”

That evening Reghu felt tired. He felt frustrated because he was far from the grasp of his Holy Grail. He could not blame the Vice Chancellor because he was a fresh arrival himself and had to learn about his challenging job. Reghu himself did not know where to start. Because of safety concerns he avoided going anywhere alone. He could have been introduced to some local writers and media, but he was told that no such things existed there. He was leaving for Kaligarh in the evening by a bus because there was no airport. Dr. Baghel came. He asked at one point of their conversation,

“Tell me something more about Rajneesh. Do you really believe that the last ruler of Bastar was killed because of his association with Rajneesh?”

“Rajneesh was born into a Jain family and Jains are mostly business people. His parents were cloth merchants. He had inherited merchandising. He combined merchandising with his knowledge of philosophy, in which he had a master’s degree and also taught this subject for a while around Chhattisgarh. He skillfully combined both with the knowledge he gained from the Ghotul of the Adivasi of

Bastar, modifying this knowledge into a saleable item for the hungry markets of the West. Salesmanship was in his blood.”

“What sort of hunger are you referring to? There is plenty to eat in the West,” Dr. Bahghel said.

“Yes, plenty to eat, but not plenty to satisfy the biological hunger. According to the press reports the Adivasi adored the Maharaja who always supported their cause. As far as Rajneesh is concerned, his life was governed by lies. He lied to collect his toys to fill his emptiness. His inside was empty and his inside was empty because he lied and he lied more to remain in show business and he was in show business to collect more money to collect more toys. He did all this to fill his emptiness and yet his emptiness kept growing deeper. When he was at the height of his glory in Oregon, his inside was emptier than ever. He was devoid of empathy and had a conniving ambition for power and fame. He was hugely successful in selling the Tantra that was new and different for the West. When he was unmasked he had nothing inside to stand by him.

“His commune was riddled with crimes. His personal secretary betrayed him and he also betrayed her. She was convicted and incarcerated. His close allies left him. He himself was arrested, jailed, fined and ordered to leave the country. About twenty countries refused to let him enter their territories. When the empire of his dreams collapsed, he came back into the arms of his mother. His female lover, Vivek, committed suicide in a hotel in Bombay a few days earlier. It was his emptiness that drove him to end his life. He had only his children with him at the last moment,” Reghu added.

“Somewhere you said Rajneesh was against the institutions of family and marriage and he used to advise mothers to let children grow without them. From which womb did those children of Rajneesh come?” Dr. Baghel asked.

“His children came from the womb of his deeds. He was brought up by his relatives. He did not know the arms of his mother, not even of a wife. He violated every pious tradition in every possible way. I strongly believe that children should be close to their mother while growing up. I also strongly believe that couples should not become parents if they are not able to provide care and love. The mother’s absence will produce a number of Rajneeshes or Oshos.” Reghu was direct.

In the evening, Reghu was taken to the bus station. While the bus passed through the tunnel of darkness on the quiet highway, his mind focused on mother. He mused on the suggestions of Shiv to visit his mother often, though he saw no point after the death of his biological mother. He often wondered why his biological mother used to ignore her own comforts and health for the sake of the betterment of Reghu, knowing she would not get back even a fraction of that.

While in those thoughts, his phone rang. “Where are you?” It was Professor Pujari from Tulsi Ram University.

“On the bus. I will be at Raipur in the morning at nine.”

“Any unforgettable experience?” Professor Pujari asked.

“I was bored because the food was not spicy in Bastar. Two males came to see me in the hotel who

promised to arrange the dinner of my liking. I don’t think I will be able to forget the appetizing taste of those chapattis and chicken. Both the males appeared to have utterly sincere souls.” Reghu said.

“They must be Nexalite.”

“For me, they were the hosts of the mythological hospitality from Dakshin Kosala who appeared from a Dandak Cave of Bastar and disappeared into the same cave,” was Reghu’s response.

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About the author:

Multiple award winning Stephen Gill has authored more than twenty books, including novels, literary criticism, and collections of poems. He is the subject of doctoral dissertations, and research papers. Ten books have been released by book publishers and more are expected to be released shortly on his works.

Interview

AN INTERVIEW WITH PRASANNA

By C.L.Khatri

(Prasanna (born 1951), is an Indian theatre director, activist and playwright and Gandhian practitioner from Karnataka. He is one of the pioneers of modern Kannada theatre. He graduated from the National School of Drama (NSD). Prasanna lives in Heggodu in Karnataka. He is known for his organisational skills and new ideas and innovations in theatre. He is a Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee. He has directed plays for National School of Drama (Repertory Company, NSD), Ninasam, Rangamandal-Bhopal, Rangayana and worked with many theatre organizations of India. He is also a Kannada playwright, novelist, and poet. Some of his dramas are: *Uli*, *Seema Paar*, *Dangeya Munchina Dinagalu*, *Ondu Lokada Kathe*, *Haddu Meerida Haadi*, *Mahihmapura*, *Jangamada Badaku*.

CLK: I welcome you to Patna and thank you for giving me time to have an interview with you. To begin with I would like to know how you got initiated in theatre and its activism.

Prasanna: I was not born in a theatre family, rather born in a middle class family. There was a lot of pressure to get educated, to score very high marks. So my parents wanted me to get into engineering. But I did not want. Actually I was a science student, did my M.Sc. in Chemistry and went to IIT, Kanpur for Ph.D. But there I realized that science didn't suit my temperament. I tend to have very intent concentration for a shorter period. I realized as a scientist I require deep concentration for a longer stretch of period. Second I wanted to work with the medium of the people.

That's why I left Kanpur and went to Karnataka. For a year I was just groping around. Then I decided to join National School of Drama. So this was the choice I made; it was not imposed upon me by my parents. Once I made the choice I went along with it.

CLK: How was your going in the new path?

Prasanna: Initially it was difficult because there was a lot of cultural gap. But somehow I worked. In 1975 I went back to my state, Karnataka. It was the time of Emergency. Without even realizing I became very political. I went into activism. I got involved into a lot of activism through theatre. I founded a group called *Samudaya* and for about six years worked with it for a mass education movement in theatre. It was an amazing theatre movement in a sense it was an alternative to *jananatya manch* that was a leftwing theater movement, limited to a political party and to street plays. *Samudaya* had larger ambition. It took people from where they were in the cultural front. And then we tried to take them beyond. We did a lot of proscenium theater and street plays. We were the people who set up several cultural instruments, like cultural *Jatthas* across Karnataka. Cultural *Jattha* was actually shaped by *Samudaya*. We took out two huge cultural *Jatthas* across Karnataka. In fact Sashtriya Sahityaparishad of Kerala and many others participated in *Jatthas*. In the process we built thirty to forty units all over Karnataka. We had a lot of fresh blood coming into theater from the deprived class, from slum. So it completely revolutionized theater and also other things. Then I become tired. So like that it started.

CLK: You are an alumnus of NSD and you have been criticizing NSD. Why is it so?

Prasanna: When N S D was started there was a very ambitious idea behind it to start, to help set up,

Indian national theater. And at that point in the beginning they had to start theater in one national language. But very quickly within five to ten years we realized that it would not work for the country with so many languages cannot have just one national theatre. So very early we realized that every so called regional language theatre is a national theatre and so Indian national theatre has to become a confabulation of these several so called regional theatres and so that sort of diversity will create unity instead of trying to have a wrong notion of formal theatre. So this was what we were trying to talk about.

And then another crisis happened in NSD. You know. We did not take sufficient precaution when industrial medium was introduced in the art, when television came, cinema came. As a result what happened was a glorious institution which was set up to train and to facilitate the growth of Indian theatre across India in small towns, in villages actually inadvertently became a ground for training people in television. It was so dangerous in a sense because even in front of our eyes students were not just going into Bombay and getting into television and cinema but even the curriculum, the styling of education started changing; the emphasis got shifted from theatre to training persons in television for example speech training had a setback; a lot of technology was moved in and so gradually what happened was the NSD graduates first of all did not go to theatre and secondly they became ineffective. They became so heavily technology minded, heavily big theatre minded, structure minded that without structure they felt completely hopeless in doing theatre in small towns. This was very alarming and I took it up and said look you can do it; first of all you have to decentralize. At least you will be sending people to regional theatres.

CLK: What is the fundamental crisis before theatre in your view? Do you think there should be SSD (State School of Drama) in every state?

Prasanna: See when you raise an issue you raise it at fundamental level. The fundamental issue is doing theatre is getting badly affected. There is a cultural, ecological crisis engulfing Indian theatre; and such cultural, ecological issue can only be tackled through the state and large movement with the participation of the people. But they have not even started thinking in that direction. They are blindly expanding all these channels, industrial mode of entertainment and doing nothing about the disaster, cultural, ecological disaster. So in that sense one is talking about NSD.

Whether you like it or not NSD has become the most important icon in Indian theatre. All policies come through NSD. All invitations come through NSD. It has become completely centralized. Unless they take it up.... You see state governments should not take it; they are even more backward; they don't even understand. So you have to attack the icon, criticize the icon; not because it is a bad icon, it's a glorious icon. Now it is completely getting derailed.

CLK: You produced Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* in 1994. And there was a long gap when you produced *Anju Mallige* and the last one *The Fire and the Rain* and then you stopped doing his play. What went wrong between you?

Prasanna: Among that generation of playwrights who came up during 1960's and 1970's Girish Karnad is definitely a very important playwright. He had tremendous talent in structuring the play and then he belongs to my language, Kannada. I did a lot of production of his plays. I did three of his plays. But every time instead of protecting the interest of the theatre he went against it. *Tughlaq* for example, NSD

asked me to do *Tughlaq* for the festivals, the production was done. We had very successful shows of it and after that it was to go to the festival abroad for Indian Repertory Theatre. And suddenly there was a political backlash. Some of them who did not like it politically tried to say that a man who is so angry and critical of Indira Gandhi how can he do this. And they tried to suggest a parallel between *Tughlaq* and Indira Gandhi. That was completely wrong; there was no such thing. So the government was wrongly advised and they removed me from its directorship. So I protested and there was a huge protest from the people, from the newspaper and in fact it was the first major issue on which almost entire country stood critical to the govt.

But Girish Karnad actually sided with the govt. And then the *Agni aur Barkha* (The Fire and the Rain) was a hugely successful production. It had some 18 shows and he wrote me a glorious letter praising the show. But he asked the NSD to withdraw the play because he said he didn't want the two changes I made in it. These changes had been done in consultation with Girish Karnad. I had taken his written permission for the changes. He did not write to me. He wrote to the Director of NSD saying that please withdraw the director of the play. I said "What has gone wrong with the director? Where is the autonomy of the institution of theatre?" Tomorrow can I say withdraw the name of Girish Karnad from *Tughlaq* ? So after that I really felt uncomfortable with him.

CLK: Perhaps you dropped the role of Brahmarakshasa and it irked him.

Prasanna: No, it was not dropped. See what happened with the Brahmarakshasa scene. The play especially in Hindi translation *Agni aur Barkha*, if it was done without editing, it was running for more than three hours and twenty minutes, very long play.

So we had to do the editing. So I reduced its role to a mere presence like Krishna in *Andha Yug*, a presence and not as a character. First of all the appearance of Brahmarakshasa even today, I feel, is desolate. The idea of Kali appearing in Hayavadana gives a comic relief. But Brahmarakshasa doesn't have any comic relief. In the end of the play when Nittilai has to be brought back to the scene, God asks Arvasu for a boon. The obvious boon is revival. When Arvasu is pleading for revival of Nittilai, Brahmarakshasa appears and pleads for his own release. And the crowd demands rain. And the playwright is trying to say that Brahmarakshasa should be released. I can't understand the logic of it. He created a metaphor of a tribal girl who represents love, rain, fertility, and every beautiful thing in the world. So I would like Nittilai to be revived, the world to be revived, life to be revived.

CLK: But there is rain in the end....

Prasanna: The rain happens why? Are you trying to say the rain will happen every time you release the Brahmarakshasa?

CLK: Whether it is rain or just the hallucination of rain as it happens in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*.

Prasanna: Well I don't want it to be a hallucination. It should rain because of the revival of Nittilai. Nittilai represents the natural in a human being. See, what is the crisis before the human civilization? We are losing natural tendencies. We are becoming machine made; we are becoming Brahminical.

CLK : Grish Karnad is said to be anti-Aristotelian playwright. But the tragedy of *Tughlaq* seems to me a case of tragic flaw in which *Tughlaq* himself is responsible for the tragedy like any of Shakespeare's tragic heroes .

Prasanna: Yes, you are right in that.

CLK: What interested you in *Tughlaq* ?

Prasanna: What excited me about *Tughlaq* is that it is the first modernist play that actually tries to link itself with the traditional construction of theatre like Parsi theater. Before *Tughlaq* plays were written in Parsi theater. You have the main characters and then you have parallel minor characters. You have Tughlaq in one set and Aziz in another. They exactly go like it happens in Parsi theatre : deep scene in which you have the king and queen and then the front scene in which you have comedy scene. What is even more important, is the merger of the two, the merger of the deep scene with the front scene, the merger of the great hero and the shallow character and it is the tragic irony. Finally *Tughlaq* has to resort to the support and help of a disgusting fellow like Aziz. So that happens because of tragic flaw. He is a brilliant guy and all that but there is such a great violence, such a great ambition in him. He has a dream. He wanted to achieve that in his own life without realising that his dream is not the dream of his people. People may not yield, so it is a flaw but how that flaw bursts out, is what is most interesting for me about *Tughlaq*. For me *Tughlaq* is yes, it looks very western. It is Hamlet type of a character. But more important is that the play is constructed in an Indian style.

CLK : How do you view your journey from *Samuday* to *Charkha* in an ideological perspective? Is it a shift from Marxism to Gandhism?

Prasanna: According to me there is no shift. This is what I have been trying to calculate. I was a socialist and today also I am a socialist. I don't want to use the term leftist or Marxist. I have a serious problem, the problem is for me I don't want to use the term working class, the moment you use the working class or labour it talks of people who are doing hard work using

machine but what we are looking at, at least in India is a part of labour class who use their hands, the entire Indian peasantry, entire Indian artisans, the entire Indian population of poor people. They used to work with their hands 20 or 30 years back and the same problem exactly after the collapse of Soviet Union. Before that Marx thought of machine as an extension of hand. The greatest Marxist poetry that was written, the greatest painting that was done was all using this metaphor of strong hand holding the machine. So the great fight was to take away the machine from the Capitalist class and hand it to the working class and the revolution will take place. So we all thought that machine will behave in the hands of the working class, which was wrong. This is what Tolstoy tried to say, Gandhiji tried to say this is what Emerson, Thoreau and all those people tried to say. You see today we have to accept it, this is not an ideological question; this is an experience. We have seen this experience again and again in Russia, in Romania, in China, in Vietnam and in other places. What happened in Vietnam? According to me the greatest Marxist or socialist leader was Ho-Chi-Minh who fought war entirely with peasantry against America. Who fought against America directly? Not Russia not China. It was Minh who fought against America. Look what has happened of Vietnam. It has become the worst Chamacha of America. Yes there is still a communist country. China is supposed to be communist; I don't care. My point is I want to ask this fundamental question. As an Indian living in a village for the last 25 years I know that machine is cutting the hands of every working person, machine is cutting not only the hands but also the language, culture etc because machine is what is pushing the market. There was a market earlier also, there was exploitation earlier also before the automatic machine came. But at that time

at least you could control it. We thought, we could fight feudalism by using the machine. But what happened? Feudalism got consolidated, market got consolidated, capitalism got consolidated and the poor Shramjeevi is so badly hit, even his confidence is gone. For me the central question is machine. Machine is the central question not only in politics; it is the central question in poetry, in theatre in everything.

CLK: So you decided to move away from Marxism and explore solutions in Gandism...

Prasanna: I have come to realize that you have to bring about a synthesis between Marxism and Gandhism also a synthesis between Ambedkar and Gandhi because what does Ambedkar represent? A constitutional change for the poor. But what is the result in the absence of social revolution among the upper castes, see the upper castes remaining there only and what are they doing? You are updating them from the lower profession and putting them in upper profession. So what will happen to these professions? We think we are going to replace these professions with machine. Is it possible, is it ecologically possible, morally, ethically possible? Let us forget all this. Ask this simple question. You want to eat with your hands, why do you shit with the machine. All the dirty work you want the machine to do and all the beautiful work you want to do with hands. It is an utterly philosophical contradiction. But unfortunately we don't want to accept; our angel is not willing to accept; left is not willing to accept it.

When you are talking of Kabir vs. the Brahmin Pandit, we should realize that Kabir represents the culture of the hand, a Brahmin represents the culture of the mind, of the horrible mind, not the good mind, the abstract mind. I would like to trust the culture of the hand, the language of the hand.

C.L. Won't it be aadhu adhure? How can you ignore mind?

Prasanna: Nobody is asking you to go back to the feudal era. But after the feudal era let us try and keep all the achievements we have had in terms of ideas. But Let us discard or at least deconstruct the machine, the technology. You can't keep the good ideas and deconstruct the machine. It is very difficult of course. But if you don't do that, humanity is going to collapse.

CLK: Don't you think machine can be used for good work. Machine is going to stay.

Prasanna: See, I posed this question philosophically. You have posed this question pragmatically. In philosophy there is no pragmatism; philosophy is about truth. Truth is that machine is going to cut your hand, cut your language, cut your culture. So I don't care and secondly I am not even talking about taking a political thesis on the deconstruction of machine. I am going by what Kabir said, what Gandhi said.... You deconstruct machine in your own personal life. It is in our hand and not in others. What you are saying is of society. Forget about it; in your personal life you start the process of deconstructing machine in your own way. You remove a machine of your choice from your life and then a whole process will start, a chain reaction will start. Initially you will feel that it is very difficult but later may be you have the strength and conviction you start enjoying. Then you will remove some other machine from your life. It's a beautiful option. Why don't you try it?

CLK: You have written poems also. Tell us something about your poetry.

Prasanna: See because of my torn life, I am very spread

out, doing various things. So I have never been able to consolidate. For example my writing career, I have taken it very seriously at least for the last thirty years I have been a serious writer but I have been writing only in Kannada. Even in Kannada people know me because of my theatre. So they don't take my literary work as seriously as they take my theatre. I am not bothered about it. As far as translation is concerned some of my plays naturally got translated but they were never published. Only one play that got translated and published was the play on Bhartendu. The play which was highly successful at the production at National Repertory. Not much is known about my literary works.

I brought out two poetry collections, two novels, 12 plays in Kannada and there are two works of criticism. Recently my book *Indian Methods in Acting* was published by National School of Drama; all its copies are sold out.

CLK: Recently Dario Fo expressed his dismay over the condition of theatre. What do you think of the present scenario of Indian theatre?

Prasanna: Theatre is in terrible crisis and it is the real crisis. It is the same crisis that is affecting all activities that have to be done in real, agriculture, handicraft, live music, live theatre, live singing are being affected. It is only the reproduction and duplicate that is thriving and they will thrive. So that is serious crisis and in fact the crisis is so deep that I have a fundamental doubt about the meaning of artist. I have this simple question when you have a million of peasants working in the fields, a few lakh artisans working on the looms and you have a Kalidasa. It has a meaning because for that community a Kalidasa is wonderful. They will be reading, they also have a portrait. Today the situation has got reverted. There

are one million artists because when you talk of art you don't only talk of theatre, you talk of Cinema, Television, Advertisement, Internet and all that. So we have reduced art into a commodity. I have a serious doubt about art. It is the time to stop doing art. There is an excess of art. There is shortage of reality. We are not working with the real hands. But theatre I love because it works with the real actors. If I can do that at my place amongst the real people I would love to do that.

CLK: You have stopped doing theatre. What is your priority now? Or what is your present engagement?

Prasanna: For the last twenty years I have been working with the handloom weavers with two institutions: Charakha and Deshi. I have gone deep into that and it is very satisfying. Now for the last 2-3 years we are in the process of setting up training institutions called SHRAMJEEVI ASHRAM. It is a training institution on the model of Gandhian Ashram. It is going to help village people learn the technique of village crafts and to bring confidence in them about their own life, about Shramjeevan. The whole idea is to create confidence in Shramjeevan from both ends. Shramjeevi people should be able to earn something and those like us who have given up Shramjeevan will have to start realizing that it is a disastrous situation morally, ethically to do this. They will have to come back to Shramjeevan.

CLK: You have been here in Patna for the last two days interacting with theatre activists and others. How do you feel about theatre activities in Bihar?

Prasanna: What I told you is about the larger social situation. But when you meet people, especially theatre people away from Delhi, away from Metro cities, in Patna and other small towns, it is a wonderful experience. They are very warm, very responsible. They

understand each other. They are not able to survive on theatre. There are so many problems.

CLK: Amidst dismay and distress what is the saving grace?

Prasanna: Today more than any other day for an intellectual and an artist the path is very clear. There is no confusion. They know what path they have to choose, they are not choosing. Those who are taking the right path are setting a trend. I am very happy with my choice: the movement of *Charkha* and *Deshi* and Sharmjeevi Ashram. More and more people are joining it, they are not just customers but they are activists. This keeps the hope alive. So I am not negative; I am very positive. But I am very critical of what we have constructed.

CLK: Thank you very much Sir for this enlightening conversation. I hope the people would see reason to check the colonial voyage of machine and not allow it to enslave the human mind and cripple the limbs.

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Jaydeep Sarangi in Conversation with Philip Salom

Philip Salom (born & August 1950) is a leading contemporary Australian poet and novelist whose books have attracted worldwide acclaim. He has published fourteen books - twelve collections of poetry and two novels - notable for their originality and expansiveness and for surprising differences from title to title. His novels are *Playback*. (Fremantle Arts Centre, 1991; 2003) and *Toccata & Rain: A novel*. (Fremantle Arts Centre, 2004). His awards and honours include Commonwealth Poetry Prize for a First Book (The Silent Piano), Western Australian Literary Award for Poetry (The Projectionist), South Australian Biennial Literary Award for Poetry - official Second Prize (The Projectionist), Writers Fellowship, Australia Council, Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Overall Best Book (Sky Poems) and Australia-New Zealand Literary Award, NZ Arts Council.

J.S.: Who inspired you to write *The Silent Piano* (1980)?

P.S. : In the late 70s I had become a friend of the older Australian poet William Hart-Smith, who was living in Western Australia at the time and at some chosen distance from the poetry world. We would meet and talk about poetry and mysticism and humour and, well, his life. The latter might sound odd, but Bill was good at anecdotes and had lived a maverick life as a young man and poet. He was my example of the poet as a genuine artist, more concerned about his work than the fame game.

J.S. : Who are the poets you read in your childhood?

P.S. : None. I lived on a farm and though my parents read a lot they didn't have any poetry books and read genre fiction, mainly, what Grahame Greene happily called 'entertainments'. I knew about narrative poetry from teachers reading it aloud but I never read adult poetry until my mid 20s. In that sense I was something of a late starter.

J.S. : Why did you choose the title *Feeding the Ghost* (Penguin, 1993)?

P.S. : There's a small poem in that collection which goes like this:

Looking for a title
then seeing what the hunger is
and what all art is:
feeding the ghost.

I hope that answers the question! It would be a shame to expand upon it.

J.S. :What according to you is a 'good' poem?

P.S. : I have just seen the following question so can pre-empt some of it by saying that I expect good poetry to have an essential inner element I call the imagination, which works on us and changes us. Imagination, for me, also includes the inventive. This, in turn, must work through linguistic freshness and precision and strike me with the poem's insights, its knowing. All these in a strong relation between feeling and form

J.S. : Can there be a poem without emotion and imagination?

P.S. : Not really, though I tend to use the term feeling (as above) because it is more subtle than emotion. There are many times that a poem, a work of

art, can move us without it being clear what is happening and what 'emotion' we are actually experiencing. And then there is compassion as a quality... So for me 'feeling' is the surer term, a wider reference... and imagination is the transport, that which moves us as readers into the space of the poem's power.

J.S. : Can writing poetry be taught?

P.S. : It can certainly be shown to advantage! An insightful teacher should reveal some of the secrets of how poems work and how a student might write similar things. There is a limit though and for many the penny never drops – they just can't get there. I had this experience myself, trying for about 18 months without being satisfied with the results, fairly sure they weren't poems at all, more little poetry-looking artifacts. Then I simply broke through, wrote several and amazed myself. The penny had dropped. Once through, it's a given. Thereafter the poems were poems, widely different in manner and success ... but poems, nevertheless. You may not be able to teach that breakthrough.

J.S. : Did you ever attend a course on creative writing?

P.S. : Yes. That is where I met Bill Hart-Smith. He was doing some casual tutoring at the University. I also met other poets in Perth and saw what they were up to, listened to them, got to know their work. And I read a great deal of poetry and thought about it, I did that crucial thinking about thinking, with poetry as the form.

J.S. : Performance poetry is gaining momentum in many parts of the world. How do you view this very special trend in poetry?

P.S. : It is a phenomenon, just as comedy and TV talent shows are. And social media as self-performance is. Honestly, I couldn't care less. Performance of poetry as entertainment and stand-up comedy and noisy show-off may attract some people to more demanding poetries, but is more likely to encourage audiences to try it themselves as the model of poetry, naively then, and even put down what they then see as literary or 'academic' poetry. The shallowness is the problem.

J.S. : Who are the important reviewers of your books and poems in the early part of your career as a poet?

P.S. : I received most support from Tom Shapcott, as poet and reviewer but also through his role as reader for my first publisher, Fremantle Press. He gave me advice on my writing and made significant editorial suggestions, and he also dropped my name in more active poetry circles. This was important because I was, by living in Perth, in Western Australia, not really part of the poetry scene, which is centred on Sydney and Melbourne.

J.S. : Do you have any dilemma in expressing beauty and truth?

P.S. : I do my best, and have a complex view of what beauty might be, or beauty of perception, of poetry itself as a mode, as an art form. Each form creates its own kind of beauty and knows beauty differently. Truth is as subtle as beauty, more varied perhaps, more rhizomic. It takes many forms and many of these are not obvious, whereas beauty often creates consensus, and shallow beauty to me is not much in the way of truth. As in sentimentality, say, in poetry.

J.S. : For P.B. Shelley, 'poets...are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and

architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society...'...Do you think this quote still holds truth in this age of cyber mania?

P.S. : Not really, if it ever did. I consider Shelley's was a bold claim, more rhetorical than true.

J.S. : You have performed as a guest poet and lecturer in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Italy, Yugoslavia, Singapore and New Zealand. Could you share your experiences?

P.S. : The performance poets conveniently forget that the rest of us often like reading/performing and I have been called a moving reader. I do like it. I enjoy placing the poem in and on the voice and giving it resonance, tone, mood, an aliveness of meaning. Each city and occasion and venue calls up some common elements and some different ones: which poems to read, will any humour carry, how long a poem, what tone to use? It can be depressing giving it your best and knowing it didn't work. In another country this is especially galling because you may never return! My strangest and in retrospect most exciting reading moment only lasted one poem. I read at night in Skopje, in a public square, along with about 30 international poets, to a crowd of about 2000 people. My poem had a dramatic build-up to a Polish song which concluded the poem, and with the benefit of my earlier interest in operatic styles of singing, I sang this full voice, in a high baritone. It was thrilling to risk doing this - the vodka probably helped - but the crowd gave me a huge ovation. They loved it. So did I.

J.S. : Can the age of facebook produce a poet like John Keats?

P.S. : Sure. If there's enough time. We forget how

astoundingly prolific Keats was and the time spent on writing and reading may seem impossible to find for keen social media people. The new 'Keats' may simply be found among those who don't indulge. But who knows?

J.S. : Why do you write poems?

P.S. : Once I realised I could write genuine poems, as against the imposters I mentioned earlier, I felt a bit special – it was always a thrill to know how and to experience (among the pains) the deep pleasures and honour even (sound soppy, but still...) of bringing off a strong poem. But I write for more than that, for the knowings I receive as I write, for the inventions and achievements, which I believe all good poetry must possess. It's hard not to. And because I haven't finished yet.

J.S. : What are your seminal volumes?

P.S. : This is a tough call. I have two essential areas of style. My central works, like *Sky Poems*, *The Well Mouth* and my forthcoming book *Alterworld*, are each a single book as an imagined world, and together they make up a cosmology. A trilogy, far from Dante, but as *Heaven*, *Limbo* and *Hope*. These are sweeping but also ironic claims!

The other style of poem I write is more personal, to do with family, people, more directly about common experiences and wonderings and feelings and what I call hauntings.

J.S. : What are your seminal issues in poetry?

P.S. : To see and understand the world as much as possible and do so within the mode and frames of poetry and poems. This is ontological. The nature of being, existence, the old thing. To relate the hauntings,

apprehensions, the energy of being, of consciousness. Which has to acknowledge the unconscious, the intuitive, the imagined, of course.

J.S. : Are you familiar with contemporary Indian poets in English?

P.S. : Not many, I must say. But then, nor am I familiar with contemporary poets from Canada or Germany. I have met Jayanta, of course, some years ago, also Keki Daruwalla and Nissim Ezekiel and I have read poets piece-meal, sometimes not recalling names. I met a group of Indian writers and poets just before I left Perth to live in Melbourne, in 1997, but generally there is not much traffic in either live or printed form. I also read with interest the poets (Keki included) in the *Southerly* special issue.

J.S. : In a poem for Jayanta Mahapatra's 80th birthday (published in *Southerly*, Vol 70, Nov., 2010) you wrote "Your poems have called up Wordsworth in the readers(.)" Could you please share your views on his poems?

P.S. : Some poetry hits you immediately with its authority and its power of perception and tone. Jayanta's is like that. There is a worldliness that lives in the local, a strength that acknowledges weakness, a seriousness that is full of compassion. He is true. And he is fully himself, not some echo of Wordsworth, which is part of what my poem considers, and yet he has the power and sadness perhaps of Wordsworth. I think my phrase was 'sad and secular'. His lyric is able to be informed by the personal for its knowing but also speaks out to readers as something more wide-reaching and impersonal, and by that I mean, his lyric poetry is never turned inward for any gratification or self-mythologising. This last is characteristic of too

many poets, sometimes quite brilliant poets, but it's very off-putting for me. Jayanta is often solemn but he is never boring as old Wordsworth could be! He has a strong social conscience too.

J.S. : During 2009-10 you worked in collaboration with Maggie Hegarty, a Melbourne photographer, to create a lucid and freshly imagined art book of poems and images. How is this book received?

P.S. : We created the 'book' before we realised we couldn't afford to produce it! Too idealistic. I think the images and poems are strong. However – the costs for such an 'art book' were too high unless we could guarantee some sales for what becomes itself a very expensive item. Collectors and archivists and libraries used to purchase such books and display them. They no longer have the budgets to allow this activity. Sadly.

J.S. : What is the future of poetry in the world?

P.S. : Same as always – there will be people who must write it, and people who must read it. Some poets will attract big readerships, and listeners, and careers, the others will just get down to the endless business of writing it. Some will excel. It is a deep activity and such activities, unlike library budgets! always survive.

J.S. : Where do you live now? Do you have any other serious engagement other than writing poetry and novel?

P.S. : I live in North Melbourne with my wife and we keep three cats. Our two children are adults and have lives extremely unlike ours and do nothing that is in any way close to poetry! I resigned from my lecturing work at the University of Melbourne to write full time. My wife is now the bread-earner and luckily we both enjoy this arrangement.

J.S. : Did you write social/personal satires? Could you please mention.....

P.S. : In 2012 I published a book called *Keepers* which is a kind of hybrid verse novel, based around an academic art institution. My approach is generally satirical, a lot of mockery and exposure of the foibles and indulgences of staff and wannabe students, as well as some more serious issues being explored, questioned... After that I created another two books written through heteronym: one lyric and rather melancholic poet who is also sardonic and who grew from the satirical voice of *Keepers*, so this book *The Keeper of Fish* is his collection (as a closet poet) of poems. Then I wrote another poet with a style and personality utterly unlike my own. His name is M A Carter and Carter truly is a satirist, an outrageous misanthrope and eccentric who writes much funnier poems than mine but whose words are much more biting and critical in manner and attack. He's a worry! His book is called *Keeping Carter*. I am all the same very proud of him. My next novel *Waiting* is about people who have very little in life and if this makes them figures of satire they are also mouthpieces for a larger critique of society, which means they get all the best lines.

My poem is over the page, and an echo of India... A Night-long Performance of Peter Brook's Mahabharata Ceaseless going over and going over swayed her voice back into millenia, the millenia in her throat swayed inside us, its sad and ceaseless zaftig of tone rose and fell under the violins chugging, in unison. Yes, chugging, not romantic. The Pandava brothers. Lament here, the drum-spats, the harmonium's square book of the Vedas opening and closing. Earth. Death. When you wake from it millenia have come and left.

Timelessness is greater time. At dawn in the local quarry we usually ignored the cliffs were cut open by Vedic wars: gelignite has nothing on this. Opened I was/we were. Peter Brook was a thousand years old in this new Sanskrit English International Cast iron Epic.

His Arjuna seized us, he was handsome and epic and everyone fought beside him, side against side, but no victory a victory: we were dying to know of epic knowing and to mourn for what is real in what is not. Nine hours and centuries is a lot of dying and of the not really real. But at six am the sun stood up amongst us and threw the rug from its shoulders. Mahabharata. Just the sound of it is glorious. We had done right and been wrong, been honourable and weak, loyal and venal, heard the tragedy of the wise and the foolish, and felt big quarry tears, the terrible, compassionate arrows of a real Mahabharata plunge through us. So filled and fooled, now we were filing home into the next world.

J.S.: Thank you for your kindness and generosity for me and my tradition. I remain grateful to you. Wishes for all your future works...

□ □

Poetry

Who is More Satisfied

A staggering widow mother
Was striding along muddy path
Holding skeletal arm of her child,
Begging some small food from
Wayside make-shift shops

An old woman shopkeeper, sunken eyes,
Handed out a small packet of puffed rice
To the mother who immediately passed on
To her hungry child who in his turn
Finished it in quick gulps
And looked satisfied. So was the unfed mother
Who is more satisfied ?

Who is Happier

A foreign tourist was pacing on the
Desolate bank of a Sundarban river-
An ill-clad, starved curious boy
Was following him vaguely
The tourist turned back to find
Him following when the brought out
Two expensive biscuits
From his backpack and handed out to the boy

The local vagabound boy was being followed
By his familiar stray dog, miserably famished
He handed out one biscuit to the dog
Who immediately ate the piece and his
Eyes looked happy
The boy also happy gulping his share
Who is happier ?

- **Pronab Kumar Majumder** (Kolkata)

Patna Today

The sun spans from east to west
City lingering on to Bailey Road.
A bra strap on sagging shape
Mean, meandering wild bones.

The oldie leans and gasps
Between her million cloans
Sitting on a hoary faded seat
Weaves her past and moans.

Flabby figure cloudy eyes
New Gandhari sobs and sighs
Power heat and throny dust
Tall structures, virtues rust.

There comes another son
With lotions and potions new
Lap it up like Manna dew
Wish it may sustain anew.

Patna bridges Magadh-Vaishali
Ganga bridge your crutch and hope,
Present links will and was
Patna lives on hope and scope.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

□ □

The dog whisperer

Famished Wandering on the indifferent streets,
The half-clad blackish man
Talks to his Invisible friends,
The pack of half-starved dogs
Following the pathetic figure, Like faithful pals.
The man
Stops midway, Interrupts his dialogue
With airy nothings
Not seen by all, And kindly,
This homeless wanderer
Whispers Sweetly
Some kind words
To the poor Shunned
Street dogs.

- Sunil Sharma, Mumbai

□ □

Can I Start Living Now ?

I

I told you my truth
that I have fled from life
you placed your lips
on my nape
living behind a numb sensation
in an elegant calm.

II

The past and the future
are enveloped in the present
that you give me
sometimes.
Time comes and goes
I only tear it to shreds
lamenting the loss
of my roofs and doors.
Moss gathering on my agony.

III

And as we walk
hand-in-hand
through the woods, "dark and deep",
I grope within, grope without,
Where are your fingers ?
Did you vanish ?
I am not with myself.

IV

Moments after sorrow sprouts
mercury spreads all over
again

leaving the heart half aglow.
You speak mascara
I understand (or, do I pretend ?)
my bosom is lighter for awhile.

V

The night unfurls.
Sometimes even
the prayers are answered !
The night assumes a sober accent
your face reflects on each piece
of the broken mirror.
I whisper, life... life....

VI

You feel my forehead
my sweat, my lips, my silken hair,
in darkness you lit the torch
and peep into my gleaming eyes
your breath sandalwood,
I fit so well into
your contours !

VII

Can I gather myself now
from the destroyed sand-shore ?
Can I search
For the new pastures now ?
Can I start living now ?

- Nandini Sahu, New Delhi

□ □

Book Review

***The Journey of a Burning Boat* - Abdus Samad, Promilla & Co. Publishers, New Delhi pp. 178, Price Rs. 250/-**

The Journey of a Burning Boat is a novel from Bihar by Abdus Samad, a noted Urdu novelist with two novels in English to his credit. The theme of the novel is trafficking in flesh trade in which impoverished children particularly girls are lured to big towns and cities with subtle plan. No doubt, the theme is topical and points a finger to the appeasement of the instinctive sexual passion of the affluent on the rise. The oldest human profession has required a new dimension in the 20th century and is ever expanding. The educated and affluent people are given to self interest and sexual indulgence sans any consideration for the suffering humanity.

In the novel there is the story of Chanda, a poor village girl who is lured to the gang of Sheila Didi, the mistress of the establishment. Throughout the story she remains a mysterious, shadowy figure. Many girls like Chanda are taken to the city on the prospect of a good job but they just land in the flesh trade. Though the writer does not present a graphic picture of the goings on in the given trade. Similarly the girls are taken to a foreign land for an unknown purpose. There the illiterate Chanda copes with others in a foreign country and is assigned the job to train other girls. The reference to "that small country" as an "island" is only ambiguous signifying nothing. Moreover, the novel ends in reunion and thereby smoothing the edges of all suffering and privation as the girl has been sending money to her poor parents and today they are living in

a palatial house. One wishes the novel were a revelation on the clandestine commerce of human trafficking and their modus operandi. The second part of the novel seems rather a loose appendage.

The novel does not impress much as it is vague, vaporous and ambiguous. The story consists in fantasy as it were. The theme remains inchoate, unrealised with the ending defeating the very purpose of showing social inequality and man's beastly passion. But one thing is remarkable, the novelist's love of poetic expressions, similes and metaphors usually avoided in a novel. The first twenty pages exhilarate the reader with figurative flashes and linguistic aroma. The very first sentence has the metaphor of a tornado and a comet. The girls "were like flowers on a garland" (14). "Their psyches were smouldering" (14), "eyes were epitomes of imminent doom" (15), the deadly python of the metropolis" (15), "razzatmazz of hair styles" (16), "personality as a candle" (17) etc.

The English translation of his Urdu novel, despite limitations, is a welcome addition to Indian English literature.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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***Voyage* : P. Gopichand & P. Nagasuseela, J.K.C. College, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh pp. 170 Price Rs. 120/-**

Here is a collection of short stories with the explicit purpose of reviving the age-old Indian tradition and culture and inculcating human values particularly in impressionable minds. The book contains 38 stories dealing with commonplace events and incidents in life. They show human weakness and the consequent suffering. Such stories have a latent moral and

reestablish the age-old values. "The Rooms Partitioned" is a sad reflection on modern man's obsession, with earning more and more jeopardising one's health and happiness. The story "From Goat to a Ghost – The Story of a Bag" is very very interesting in that it is the autobiography of a bag how it was made from the hide of an animal and how it felt in course of its journey from an animal to a leather bag.

The book presents an assortment of stories from various walks of life and different disciplines. "The Sketchy Time" and "Those were the Days" are stories of campus life. "The Chameleon" is about the ominous note attached with the birth of a girl child. The story "Hand-rickshaw Puller" is the story of a handicapped who struggles against crushing poverty and earns bread for his family by dint of hard labour. The story "Ladki" is a translation from Hindi which highlights gender discrimination against a girl in the family which is as it is in our society. *Nat-Natin* is another translation from Hindi. It is based on a popular mythological story with a moral. The story reads like a fairy tale with the usual fantasy and romance. "The Cost of Dignity" pinpoints the definition of shame for different strata of people. To one not flaunting the new Apple i-phone before friends is shameful, to another being in rags; to a third possessing an old car and so on. But the clown forgoes his sense of shame to earn his keep. The very first story "Sin" is a realistic portrayal of how old parents are treated by children. The ill-treatment of old-age parents has reversed our age-old culture and tradition. By implication the story suggests a revival and preservation of our essential Indian values of life.

The stories in this collection nicely mirror the contemporary scenario with depleting traditional

values day by day. They present a variety of the aspects of human life. They are interesting, appealing and edifying. The stories have been written in a simple language. They have the feel of the fable, a mythological story, a popular story and an autobiographical story—all in one volume. The intended message is welcome all the more.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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Five Indian Women Novelists : C. L. Khatri & Sandhya Saxena, Y King Books, Jaipur (2013), pp. 251, Price Rs. 995/-

The present book is a critical study of the five Indian English women novelists— Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai, Shobha De and Gita Mehta all belonging to the second generation Indian English writing. These women novelists have one thing in common, their preoccupation with women's issues like women's role in a patriarchal society, their age-old subjugation, cultural constraints and the growing awareness and struggle for emancipation and empowerment.

The first ten articles by different scholars are devoted to Shashi Deshpande's novels. C. P. Sharma finds Deshpande's vision well articulated in *The Dark Holds no Terrors*. In fact, this novel is her dearest, a kind of a manifesto of her vision on women's position in contemporary India. She is not a blatant feminist but at the same time nor a status quoist. Her novels reveal gender injustice and cultural prejudice against the female sex and pleads for equality and respectable status. In *That Long Silence* there is an attempt to make some sort of adjustment with the tradition. Deshpande admits that hers is not the strident and militant kind

of feminism which sees the male as cause of all malaise. She rather advocates a world in which all are regarded equally as human beings rather than as male and female. That is her idea of feminism. *The Narayanpur Incident* is the only novel of Deshpande which is different in theme from other novels. Here it is the Quit India movement and its repercussion in a small village. The women are here as much active as men in fighting for independence.

The case of Manju Kapur is different in that she touches upon the volatile aspects of man-woman relationship. In *Difficult Daughters* there is the illicit relationship between a student and an already married professor. *A Married Woman* is all about lesbianism. *The Immigrant* is about a woman whose husband suffers from sexual inadequacy. *Custody* deals with the question of children's custody in case of separation, all currently agitating problems causing marital conflict. The eleven papers are focussed on these issues in Kapur's novels.

The book has three papers on Shobha De. C. L. Khatri in his paper tries to locate her place in Indian English fiction. According to him her popularity is based on sexploitation and pornography for which she has been ignored by great Indian critics like C. D. Narasimhaiah, M. K. Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee. She is just a "high priestess of gossip and innuendo", "equivalent of Hindi films with their peehole voyeurism". Her *Socialite Evenings* is aimed at taking revenge on men by having extra-marital affairs and finally divorce. *Starry Nights* unhesitatingly serves sex on a platter and thus abusing and degrading the female sex by way of liberating them. De's treatment of lesbianism is part of the series. Other articles in the

book speak of the formal qualities of her writing.

Kiran Desai the recipient of the Man Booker Prize made her mark with *The Inheritance of Loss*. It shows her reading of man's success and material gain in the West but the loss of one's inherited values in the East. A paper in this context calls the novel meditative musings on the part of the novelist. Her *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, a comic and satirical story which has the character of a fable and a fantasy, is regarded as a psychological portrayal of its protagonist. Desai has successfully explored the inner recesses of Sampath's subconscious mind.

Gita Mehta became famous for her *Karma Cola* which is a collection of essays sarcastic to the West's infatuation with India. She exposes the hallowness behind the Sham gurus' transcendental meditation. Her first novel *Raj* is the story of a shattered princess in the twilight years of the British rule in India. Her *A River Sutra* is a novel in six stories. The most remarkable thing about this book is that apart from the normal story teller the river Narmada happens to be the connecting link. The theme of the novel is the bond between nature and human being presented in a novel form.

The book as a whole appeals much as exclusive study of individual novelists all of them living ones. Though not a complete monograph of each one, these perceptive studies throw sufficient light on different aspects of these novelists. The book is a valuable addition on fiction studies.

- Ram Bhagwan Singh

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***Indo-Australian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry : Vibrant Voices* edited by Sunil Sharma, Rob Harle & Sangeeta Sharma, Authors Press, E-35/103, Jawahar Park, Laxami Nagar, Delhi- 110092, PP. 399, Rs. 595/-**

Whenever I come across a poetry book I feel my existence as a poet in it and get reassured of its vibrancy despite the hegemonic presence of fiction in the market. It is taken for granted that poetry has no market and still Sudarshan Keherry continues to publish poetry book. I find in him a dependable friend of Muse who deserves Kudos.

The trio-editors Sunil Sharma, Sangeeta Sharma and Rob Harle have done a commendable job by making selected poems of 38 Indian poets (most of them are established names) and of 18 Australian poets in one volume. The irony with the poets is that they are popular or known not their poems until and unless their poems are prescribed in the courses. Anthologies and nowadays online poetry magazines partly bridge this gap.

It is a bouquet of poetic flowers of various hues from two countries. There is obviously a wide range of poems in theme, style, language as well as quality. The presence of pretty senior poets like Shiv K. Kumar, Jayant Mahapatra, Gopikrishnan Kottor, Bibhu Padhi, K. Satchidanandan lends authenticity and credibility to the anthology. On the other hand inclusion of emerging vibrant poetic voices like A. V. Koshy, Bishnupada Ray, Anna Sujatha Mathai, K. K. Srivastava, Jaydeep Sarangi, Vihang Nayak and others make it fairly representative of Indian English Poetry.

Most of the poems are written on common subjects in poetry but A.V. Koshy's 'Jalebi' drew my attention

for its subject reminding me that nothing is beyond the purview of poetry. Ambika Ananth has effectively translated the trauma of old age in poetry creating a wave of emotion in "Sunset Years". Ananya S. Guha is able to take us along on his tour in "And I will Return to Udaipur", or in his memory in "Evening's Nascent Memories." It is something very homely and intimate that misteriously touches the reader. The sense of loss in terms of culture is well echoed in Anna Sujatha Mathai's "My Lost Language" in a simple reflective mode. His self probing on surer foot is captivating in "Goddess without Arms" and "The Lost Centuries". If Bishnupada Ray and Shreekumar Verma stand out for their use of language (all small letters), experimental mode like e.e. cummings, Sharmila Ray is distinguished for her prose-poems. Rukhaya's stark honesty bordering on bluntness has its own charm in "Jihad", "Not Criticism" and "Talash" churned out of bitter experiences and expressed with a tongue of flame. The grim social realities and the incongruities of life haunt poets like R. K. Swain in "A Poem's Worth", "August Fifteen, 2000", Murali Sivaramakrishanan in his sequel poems "Moon Rise" and Meena Kandasmy in "Dead Woman Walking". Here the use of small letters is integral to the design of the poem and reinforces its subaltern them. Look at its rhythm "i wept in vain, i waited, i walked on my head, i went to god." If Jayant Mahapatra and Bibhu Padi bring to life Oriya ambience, culture and landscape in poetry, Tabish Khair and Jaydeep Sarangi have tried the same to do with their native places Bihar and West Bengal respectively. Tabish at times is nostalgic as in "Amma." A writer can hardly escape his time, place and milieu. Sangeeta Sharma designs her poems in descriptive way and ends it with an ironic quip as in "Navaratri", "An Evening in Mumbai" and "Farce". Sudeep Sen ceates

images in aphoristic language that speaks louder than words. "My lost memory / white and forzen / now melts colour / ready to refract." His poems are short and crisp; and his imagination creates a sensuous picture.

"Under the soft translucent linen,
the ridges around your nipples
harden at the thought of my tongue."

Sunil Sharma lends voice to the voiceless in the metros through evocative images be it the gypsy living in tents on the fringe of Mumbai in "The Blue Gypsy Camp" or the elderly persons living alone in "The Jarring / solitude" or the girl child decked as Kali outside the Kali temple, or the female workers on the construction site. The poet gives an extension to his cosmopolitan poetic sensibility. He goes deeper to decipher the clue of life in the song of suffering :

A young one feeding a child,
Turning through this sisterhood
Of pain and understanding,
The dull and demanding work
Into a pure sensuous delight.

Vihang Naik creates a new idiom of poetry. In his hand even trite becomes poetic and poetry flows effortlessly. His poems on the making of a poem and his *Manifesto of Poetry* are of special beckoning light of the day.

Australian group comprising eighteen poets show that there is no geography of poetry and despite differences of experience they transmit at the same wavelength. For example Will Fraser's "Peace Crimes" echoes Sunil Sharma's in his foreboding effect 'Shattered forest and poisoned river / that slash and burn of the spirit." Haiku type poems of Christopher

Kelen and Robin Archbold, and the use of cyber idioms in David Hallett are common nowadays in India. The two groups echoe each other in forms, poetic idioms, in their reflection on contemporary crisis, and exploration of their memories, celebration of Nature and the essential human sensibility lending voice to the voiceless. Robe Harle's 'Primal Desire', 'Sandstone to Ink' and 'The Second Comming' are testimony to poets' engagement with the universal and the human.

It has been for me a pleasant and rewarding read and it is a worth preserving book at an affordable price for every poetry lover.

- C. L. Khatri

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Pronab K. Majumder : *Poetry House*, Kolkata, *Bridge-in-Making* Publication, 2013, PP. 88, Rs. 300/-

Pronab K. Majumder is a significant signature in India English Poetry. He is a versatile personality who has richly contributed to poetry in English and Bengali short story, one act plays and translation and is well recognized as an editor of poetry magazine *Bridge-in-Making* and of four anthologies of poetry in English.

The book under review is his eighteenth collection of poetry consisting of eighty eight poems on different themes and thoughts and composed in different forms. His persistent poetic engagement with 'Time' is reaffirmed in this volume, too. He begins with poems on time "Solemnity of Time", 'Time Beyond' and "Brief History of Time". In him philosophy and poetry blends in lyrics that appeal to both ears and mind :

1. Time catches Time snatches
In the flux lucks come in batches
2. Time myth Time history behind

Sometimes malignant again kind.

He can create aphorisms without embedding them with aphoristic incomprehensibility. His philosophic musings are based on his empirical observations that take into account all possible dimensions of time and still leaves it open for future exploration "Do you know for sure what is actual ?"

His ingenious use of concrete imagery for abstract 'Time' while maintaining the rhyme and rhythm of poem shows the maturity of his craftsmanship :

"Time is an emerging carriage having no pilot car
No hooter waits, no caution bell rings."

Or brilliant poetic flashes like :

"Occupants of the multiverse are beads
Of the elongated thread of Time rusher."

'Time' and 'Relationship' are the major preoccupations of Pronab's Muse. More than a dozen poems are on 'Time' and about twenty on 'Relationship'. He explores the different aspects of human relationship. He sings its primordial beauty, how it crumbles today like 'sand castle', erosion of relationship in the age of globalization and the need to rediscover Relationship with the aid of love. He muses on his relations with mother, father, friends, wife and lately with his grandson, a little angel who infuses life in him :

"My longings for living longer enhance
When he came bright, beaming, brilliant
Like emerging sun dispelling silence of
Dark night I was dipped in"

It is one of the few poems of free verse in this book. Otherwise most of his poems are rhymed verse

with a dominance of couplets and quatrains. They are suffused with appropriate symbols, images, metaphors, similes and alliterations. Poems on grim social realities and foibles of life 'Comfortable Companion', "Light and Life" or on poetry "Poetry is Life Whole", "Poetry not Subject of Reason" and "Poetry Connect of Culture" defining his Muse are equally stimulating and are specimen of good poetry that is going to stay with us forever.

- **Dr. Kumar Chandradeep**

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