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COVER STORY

CORRUPTION IN INDIA

Dr. Andrew Sanchez

The momentum of last year's hunger strike by the anti-corruption campaigner Kisan 'Anna' Hazare currently sees India's parliament wrestling with the formation of a national corruption ombudsman. Hazare's campaign rests upon the proposition that the democratic ideals with which the Indian state was formed in 1947 are all too often subverted by the self-interest of public servants. Hazare's supporters argue that this process has two primary effects. First, corruption allows wealthier citizens to access resources and preferential state treatment to which they are not entitled. Second, corruption constitutes a drain on the coffers of many ordinary Indians, in the form of demands for bribes by state functionaries, without which their services cannot necessarily be procured.

Hazare's formulation is largely correct, and if popular support for his campaign is any indication, he has articulated a political frustration with bribery that is unique in spanning the regional, ethnic and religious divisions of Indian society. However, the discontent which Hazare's movement expresses relates to a corruption that is broader than bribery alone. 'Corruption' in this context encompasses a more pernicious subversion of the Indian state that has seen substantial numbers of often violent career criminals enter parliament since the 1970s, and has consequently weakened popular faith in governmental institutions.

'Lokpal' Bill May Not Deliver

The current relationship between politics and criminality is a consequence of a culture of entrepreneurial corruption that adheres to Indian public office. While parliamentary service remains such a lucrative profession, it will continue to attract individuals whose

ambitions extend beyond the confines of their position, and whose means of satisfying them include coercion. The extent to which Hazare will find satisfaction in India's corruption ombudsman depends in the first instance on whether the 'Lokpal' (protector of the people) bill to which it relates is ever enacted; the bill is

Pro-Hazare, anti-corruption protests



currently stalled in the upper house of the Indian parliament and may never be fully realised. However, should the bill be passed, it is unlikely that the scrutiny of an ombudsman alone can provide the framework necessary to combat corruption at the higher reaches of the Indian state. The task requires a substantial overhaul of the wider legislation that currently protects the most powerful public servants who abuse their positions, and a real engagement with the influence of violence and organised crime on national politics.

Corruption Erodes Political Authority

'CORRUPTION' IN THIS CONTEXT ENCOURAGES A MORE PERNICIOUS SUBVERSION OF THE INDIAN STATE THAT HAS SEEN A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF VIOLENT CRIMINALS ENTER PARLIAMENT...'

Anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International currently ranks the national perception of corruption in India to be 87th highest in the world (in an index of 182 positions). While many nations fare better than India in this ranking, many evidently fare much worse, including regional neighbours Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, the real significance of perceptions of corruption does not lie in the extent to which phenomena such as bribery are perceived to be

prevalent across society. A more important assessment is of how differing forms of corruption are deemed to be concentrated at different levels of the state and whether such practices are seen as integral to the consolidation of power. In India, public scandals of the previous twenty years, which link numerous elected politicians and even government ministers to repeated acts of parliamentary corruption, embezzlement, land seizure, blackmail, extortion, kidnap and murder, serve to erode the assumption of legitimate

Continued on page 4

THE HYPOCRISY OF NATIONS

The recent vote at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on Sri Lanka's record at the end of its war with the Tamil Tigers when over 40,000 innocent civilians are alleged to have been killed is an object lesson on the widely varying standards of analysis and argument now prevalent among the nations of the world. Far from the merit or human rights aspect of the question being the sole consideration, forty seven members were unable to agree among themselves on the morality and the humaneness of the issue, moral scruples certainly being the least priority.

It was manifestly clear that even quite a few of those who voted for the US sponsored resolution did so over questions of loyalty or obligation to the United States, rather than moved by the horrendous and sweeping murder by the Sri Lankan government they would have that government indicted for. While saluting India for the welcome last minute change in its stand, it nevertheless needed tremendous pressure and persuasion to make that change, clearly the result of unrelenting prodding by the Tamil Nadu government that had even threatened to withdraw support to the coalition government. Thanks to Tamil Nadu, the world saw an Indian volte face.

Now what of the future? How does a world body bring a recalcitrant nation, Sri Lanka, deliver the goods as desired? We have the classic case of South Africa, where the entire world ranged against it to have 'apartheid' listed as a dirty word.

We remain resolute that only an independent, international investigation and global pressure will bring justice to the victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and their families. However, these important small steps can pave the way for an international mechanism towards truth, accountability and lasting peace on the island. **C**

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR: JOE NATHAN
(J.A. Sothinathan)
Telephone: 020 8771 1156
Email: confluenceuk@btinternet.com

DESIGNER: HOWARD LAKE

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INDIA & PAKISTAN CELEBRATE NATIONAL DAYS



Pakistan Day: Pakistan High Commissioner for UK H.E. Mr. Wajid Shamsul Hasan hoisting the national flag at the Pakistan High Commission in London on March 23rd 2012. Officers of the High Commission were also present.



To commemorate the 63rd Republic Day of India, on 26 January 2012, a ceremony was held at India House in the morning when the Acting High Commissioner, Ambassador Rajesh N. Prasad unfurled the National Flag. It was followed by the singing of the National Anthem and the telecast of the address to the Nation, delivered on the eve of the Republic Day, by the Hon'ble President of India Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil. The function was attended by the officers and members of staff of the High Commission along with their family members.

BHAVAN MARKS 40TH ANNIVERSARY IN LONDON



A grand concert celebrating the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's 40th anniversary in the UK, *Aagami—The Future*, took place at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southbank Centre on Saturday 17th March to a sell-out audience. Almost 70 talented performers set the Queen Elizabeth hall aglow with the evening's programme presented in collaboration with MILAPFEST.

PAKISTANI STUDENT ELECTED PRESIDENT OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE STUDENTS



A Pakistani student Arsalan Ghani from Faisalabad is elected as the President of Cambridge University Graduate Union. The results were announced on Wednesday 7th March 2012. He defeated his rival Amie Ladley in the elections.

He will lead the student union representing 12,000 MA, MPhil PhD, students studying at Cambridge University. It is a sabbatical position meaning that Arsalan has to intermit his studies and take a full time role as president and head the union offices. This is the first time ever, in the over 800 years history of the Cambridge University, that a Pakistani Student has been elected as the President of the Graduate Union.

Arsalan did his bachelors from National Textile University Faisalabad and then Masters in Belgium. He worked in industry, university and government before proceeding for his PhD in manufacturing policy from Cambridge.

THE KASHMIR IMBROGLIO

It is important that India and Pakistan be persuaded that a rationalized Line of Control be converted into an international border

Ishtiaq Ahmed

The Kashmir imbroglio is a classic outcome of the vagaries of colonial withdrawal. When British rule ended in the Indian Subcontinent in mid-August 1947, power was transferred to two states—India and Pakistan—following a contentious, bitter and bloody partition that left more than a million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs dead and some 14-18 million uprooted from the homes and driven across the international border that was drawn between the two states. The principle on which the partition took place was that contiguous Muslim-majority areas of north-eastern and north-western India were separated to create Pakistan. Pakistan comprised two separate wings, East and West Pakistan; East Pakistan later broke away to become Bangladesh in December 1971.

Technically the lapse of Imperial Paramountcy as a result of British withdrawal meant that the treaties between the hundreds of princely states and Britain became redundant. However, the princely states were expected to join either India or Pakistan. India was especially very concerned about balkanization as a result of princely states becoming independent. The legal right to sign the Accession Bill was vested in the ruler who was expected to take into consideration the wishes of his people.

Muslim Majority Territory Under Indian Control Led To Problems

The Jammu and Kashmir State (hereafter referred to as Kashmir) was founded in 1846 when the British sold the Kashmir Valley and adjoining areas to Gulab Singh Dogra, a Rajput Hindu ruler of Jammu, for Rs 7.5 million. In 1947 there was an overall Muslim majority of 78 per cent in Kashmir. Since 1949, the State is divided into two parts following a war between India and Pakistan: roughly two-third is under Indian control and one-third under Pakistani control. On the whole Muslims still constitute the majority of the Indian Kashmir, some 64 per cent. On the other hand, the Pakistani Kashmir comprises almost entirely of a Muslim population, most of them of the Sunni sect.

It is generally agreed that the Maharaja was toying with the idea of remaining independent, but both India and Pakistan desperately wanted to acquire Kashmir and tried to advance their influence through their allies and supporters in the State. Apart from the legal fictions maintained by both sides, problems of identity and self-image complicated matters. For India retention of Kashmir was an essential feature of its secular-composite national identity while Pakistan considers its Muslim identity incomplete as long as Kashmir has not joined it. In fact in the acronym Pakistan created by taking the first letter of Muslim majority provinces and regions in north-western India, K stood for Kashmir. The principle according to which British India was to be divided between India and Pakistan was that contiguous Muslim majority areas were to be given to Pakistan. In geographical terms Kashmir was directly contiguous to Pakistan even when the Partition Plan of 3 June 1947 was about directly administered British provinces and regions and not princely states.

In any event, a tribal force backed by Pakistani regulars entered Kashmir on the night of 21-22 October 1947 with a view to liberating it and making it join Pakistan. The Maharaja decided to sign the bill of accession with India on 26 October 1947. India despatched its troops by air and land and a protracted war, comprising mainly of small battles and skirmishes took place. On 1 January 1949, a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations came into effect with both sides maintaining control over the territory they had acquired during the conflict. Subsequent Security Council resolutions called for a plebiscite, but were never implemented as both sides dug deep

into the territories under their control and armed themselves with legal briefs justifying their respective standpoints on that issue. While Pakistan insisted that the plebiscite should be held to ascertain the views of the Kashmiris the Indians claimed that in 1954 the Kashmir Assembly voted in favour of merger with India and therefore the Kashmir accession had become permanent and irrevocable. Moreover it asserted that Article 370 of the India Constitution ensured substantial autonomy to the Kashmiris and therefore there was no basis to consider any other option but the merger. It demanded that Pakistan should vacate those territories of the State that had come into its possession during the 1947-48 war.

India Overrules Third Party Mediation; Pakistan In Favour

In any case, India and Pakistan fought another war over Kashmir in 1965 along the international border and in the air and international waters. It proved to be a stalemate too. In 1972 the ceasefire line was converted into the Line of Control (LoC) at Simla in the aftermath of the 1971 war between the two rivals in which Pakistan lost East Pakistan. The Indian government could not win over the trust of the Kashmiri Muslims and constant interference in Kashmiri provincial politics resulted in mass protests and outbreak of violence from the late 1980s onwards. In the 1990s Pakistan started sending so-called *Mujahideen* (holy warriors) into Kashmir with a view to liberating it from India. It resulted in atrocities by Mujahideen, their Kashmiri affiliates and the Indian security and military forces.

In 1999, a limited war was fought between India and Pakistan at Kargil on the LoC. This time both sides were armed with nuclear weapons. However, international pressure and diplomacy prevailed and the conflict ended without either side making any significant gain. All along on the diplomatic front, India consistently overruled third party mediation or arbitration while Pakistan persisted in favour of it.

Besides matters of national identity and prestige the Kashmir dispute was also fuelled by security concerns pertaining especially to water. The most developed agricultural regions of north-western India especially the Green belts of Punjab and Haryana, and almost the whole Pakistani agricultural sector are dependent on the waters from rivers which originate in the mountains of Kashmir or the adjacent Himalayan range. These rivers meander into the territories of both the states. Consequently, the state which constitutes the upper riparian enjoys a strategic advantage because it can divert the flow of water or even deny it to the other. This advantage is enjoyed by India.

Indus Water Treaty Heralded Agreement On Water Sharing

Surprisingly, although tension and hostility over Kashmir have remained high and erupted in wars, both sides realized that they could not afford to postpone an agreement on water sharing until the final status of Kashmir was settled. Consequently, under the auspices of the World Bank the Indus Waters Treaty was agreed between them in 1960 whereby the waters of the three eastern rivers—Ravi, Sutlej and Beas—were awarded to India. Pakistan was allocated water from the western rivers of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab. The treaty allowed Pakistan to construct a system of replacement canals to convey water from the western rivers into those areas in West Pakistan which had previously depended for their irrigation supplies on water from the eastern rivers.

In subsequent years, Pakistan built the Mangla and Tarbela dams and several other similar facilities on the waters of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab. The funding came from international donors. Similarly India has been building dams and barrages on the Ravi, Sutlej and Beas. Disputes over the shared waters have cropped up from time to time, most notably over the

Baglihar dam which India has constructed on Chenab River. It was submitted for arbitration. The ruling given by the arbitrator upheld the Indian right to build the dam but recommended some changes in the construction that were in violation of the 1960 agreement. However, Pakistan is deeply worried that if India continues to build such dams it would seriously harm Pakistan's interests.

Musharaf-Vajpayee Agreement Opposed By Indian Ultra Nationalists

A sort of breakthrough was achieved in the aftermath of the 1999 Kargil mini-war between the two rivals. General Pervez Musharraf who masterminded the Kargil Operation climbed down from the official stand of Pakistan that the UN resolutions be implemented in letter and spirit. Such a radical break from Pakistani orthodoxy on the Kashmir dispute was significant as Musharraf represented the most powerful element in the Pakistani power elite—the Pakistan military or rather the Pakistan Army. He accepted that it was impossible to redraw the borders but that some formula of conceding maximum autonomy to the two Kashmiris could be acceptable to Pakistan.

Musharraf alleged that an understanding had been reached between him and Vajpayee at the July 2001 Agra Summit but at the last moment ultra-nationalist forces in the BJP and in the Indian bureaucracy sabotaged the Agra Declaration which would have facilitated a resolution of the Kashmir dispute. The second time this happened when an anti-Musharraf movement starting in 2007 culminated with his ouster in August 2008. A US secret cable revealed by the whistle-blower Internet network, Wikileaks, claimed that Musharraf and Manmohan Singh had worked out a "non-territorial" solution to the Kashmir dispute.

It must be said that without a reasonable solution of the Kashmir dispute a real psychological breakthrough to normalize relations between the two states will not be forthcoming. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated that while borders cannot be redrawn they can be rendered superfluous by building trust and prosperity through trade and other constructive interaction between the two nations.

There are several reasonable solutions on the line. Neither can win a war against the other even if it can launch a surprise attack. Both are likely to inflict irreparable damage on each other especially if they use nuclear weapons. It is clear that no zero-sum approach or 'winner takes all' solution is likely to succeed. The UN resolutions regarding a plebiscite are clearly not workable. The third option about an independent Kashmir will always be opposed by the Hindu and Buddhist minorities and it is doubtful if the Indian and Pakistan governments would approve of it.

It is therefore important that India and Pakistan be persuaded that a rationalized Line of Control be converted into an international border. As soon as that happens, both states should start withdrawing or at least drastically reducing their armed personnel from their respective parts. Kashmiris from both sides should be allowed substantial autonomy, but without the right to maintain their own armed forces. This should be accompanied by relatively free travelling facilities between the two sides for *bona fide* Kashmiris, though without the automatic right to settle on the other side. The Indus Waters Treaty should continue to be the basis of water sharing between India and Pakistan. **C**

Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed holds a Ph.D in Political Science from Stockholm University, where he is Professor Emeritus of Political Science. He is also Honorary Senior Fellow of the Institute of South Asian Studies (SAS) at the National University of Singapore.



Continued from page 1: **Corruption In India**

political authority and the efficacy of the ballot box.

While bribery in its many forms undoubtedly impedes the proper functioning of institutions, the preponderance of criminal politicians corrupts the very notion of the accountable and democratic state on which the idea of India rests.

The popular perception of Indian political criminality is well substantiated by the available data. In the current Indian parliament, of the 543 elected representatives of the lower house, 158 (29 percent) are currently charged with a criminal offence. More shockingly still, seventy four (14 percent) are charged with crimes in the most serious category of offence, comprised of murder, rape, extortion, banditry and theft. While it is problematic to draw a simple relationship between criminal charges and actual guilt, it is apparent that politicians fall foul of the law far more frequently than almost any other section of Indian society, posing the pertinent question of why particular types of people are so often attracted to a political career.

Alternatively, though less plausibly, one could ask why it is that politicians are so disproportionately targeted for spurious criminal investigations. The distribution of criminal charges within the Indian parliament is weighted towards MPs representing the smaller parties, whose support bases rely upon the politics of caste and ethno-regionalism. Among the two major parties, the Congress Party, whose ideology is a secular state-socialism, has 5 percent of its 205 MPs currently facing charges, while the Bharatiya Janata Party, representing a broad platform of Hindu nationalism, sees 16 percent of its 116 MPs charged. At the other end of the spectrum, the regional Samajwadi and Bahujan Samaj parties, who predominantly represent the interests of untouchable castes, have 60 percent of their MPs currently charged. Other ethno-regional parties fare similarly poorly. Interrogating this phenomenon better substantiates the contexts in which criminals are likely to enter Indian politics.

Incorporation Of Criminals Into Indian Politics Stems From Indira Gandhi's 'State Of Emergency'

Many of the Indian political parties strongly associated with criminality have their support bases in a vast northern swath of the country, running from the state of Haryana in the centre west, across Uttar Pradesh to the eastern states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Obscuring the understanding of political criminality in these states is a popular national perception of this region as a violent, culturally conservative backwater, plagued by poverty and communalism. That some of the politicians who represent these states should be criminal despots is often said to express the particular troubles and cultural dispositions of the region. In reality, the emergence of political criminality in this part of India relates to the use of political violence by the central government from the 1970s, and the present relationship between provincial criminal politicians and their ostensibly more legitimate counterparts is closer than one would suspect.

In explaining the rise of India's criminal politicians, one might consider the possibility that a new type of charismatic political leader emerged during the 1970s that broke with the 'statesman' model of the Congress Party, and was valued for their willingness to dirty their hands on behalf of their constituents. Certainly, a profound change overtook political leadership during this period, as violence began to be valued more highly by certain sections of the electorate, particularly within ethno-regional movements. However, the widespread incorporation of criminals into Indian politics stems initially from the use of coercion during Indira Gandhi's 'State of Emergency' from June 1975 to March 1977.

During this period, the Congress Party embarked upon a dictatorship, ostensibly to secure national unity in the midst of parliamentary turmoil. The 'emergency' saw many civil liberties suspended and political dissent silenced through widespread arrest and coercion, a significant proportion of which was conducted by criminal enforcers at the behest of the state.

The most successful of these criminals amassed sufficient power and influence to enter parliament themselves, where the status of

their office could further their enterprises. The present concentration of India's criminal politicians in quite particular areas of the nation can be explained with reference to the political economics of the regions concerned.

Across Haryana, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, post independence rural relations have been characterised by a progressively open state of conflict between lower-caste tenants and their upper-caste landlords.

In this climate, the use of politically orchestrated violence is increasingly salient, and charismatic criminal leadership is more likely to flourish. In Bihar, criminal authority was further entrenched by 1975's statewide alcohol prohibition, which created a lucrative market for bootlegged liquor. Regional criminal organisations prospered in the 1970s by providing coercive political services and fulfilling black market demands for consumer goods. These organisations eventually diversified into labour contracting, haulage, mineral extraction, metal trading and waste disposal as the region's industrial sectors expanded throughout the 1980s. During the 1990s, the power of regional criminal politicians received a further boost from the centre, as a series of weak coalition governments allowed the smaller parties on which they were dependent to wield a disproportionate level of power in parliamentary votes. It is during this period that the Congress Party became embroiled in the 'bribes for votes' scandal, which saw Prime Minister Narashima Rao convicted of corruption, and Sibn Soren, the head of the ethno-regional Jharkhand Mukti Morcha Party, convicted for the



directly related murder of an alleged blackmailer.

It is not coincidental that the areas of the nation in which political authority currently enjoys the least confidence (namely Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh) are also those regions which afford political entrepreneurs some of the greatest economic opportunities through land seizures, industrial contracting, racketeering and labour brokerage. The penetration of known criminals into parliament has its clearest origins in the emergency's use of applied violence. One might also conclude that the class and ethnic conflicts of particular regions explains why violence initially became a feature of charismatic leadership in Indian politics. However, it is the capacity of parliament to enable the consolidation of personal power that presently explains the allure of a political career to criminals, as well as the Indian electorate's increasingly strident denunciation of such forms of authority. The challenge presently facing the Indian state is to restore public confidence in the morality and capacity of the nation's politicians, by ensuring that criminals find it harder to gain entry to a potentially lucrative parliamentary career. Meeting this challenge requires an as yet absent governmental will to reform the legislation that enables those charged with serious offences to stand for office, and to avoid future criminal investigation once elected.

Six Lokpal Bills Since March 1964 Not Acted Upon

The current governmental response to Hazare's campaign seems encouraging, and is at the very least testament to the power of a well-informed citizenry to press its demands upon the state. However, one must doubt the depth and perhaps the sincerity with which the Indian parliament presently searches its collective soul. Neither the issues raised by Hazare or their proposed remedies are

new. On the contrary, the corruption and criminalisation of politics has been the subject of numerous governmental commissions since the 1960s, most of which have reached the same conclusions as Hazare, and have vainly made almost identical suggestions for reform to those presently under discussion.

For example, the first Indian Committee on the Prevention of Corruption reported its findings as early as March 1964, having been convened to investigate a perceived rise in ministerial corruption since independence. The committee concluded that India's legislative framework was ill equipped to deal with political corruption, and outlined a procedure whereby complaints against members of parliament could be investigated by an independent committee, prior to police referral. If the 1964 committee's suggestions seem well suited to the current political climate, it is because they were never acted upon and the legislative failings which they identified have remained largely unaddressed for the previous four decades. Likewise, the 'Lokpal' bill, currently so fiercely debated, has a long and faltering ancestry in Indian politics. Between 1969 and 1998, six separate Lokpal bills have been passed in India, only to lapse with the dissolution of parliament.

The fate of proposals directed more specifically at flagrantly criminal acts of political corruption is worse still. Most recently, the 2010 background paper on electoral reforms prepared by the Indian Election Commission has revisited two unheeded recommendations with which to combat the criminalisation of Indian politics, both of which were first proposed in 2004. The Commission advises that prospective candidates for the lower house of the Indian parliament be required to declare all previous convictions, pending criminal cases and assets prior to standing, and suggests that the withholding of such information should be made punishable by a minimum of two years imprisonment. Moreover, the commission recommends disqualification for all candidates against whom charges have been brought at least six months prior to election for the most serious category of offences. While a number of the Committee's wider recommendations (regarding restrictions on the publication of exit poll results and the closer scrutiny of deposit monies) have been enacted, the bulk of suggestions that would curtail the entry of criminals into parliament have yet to find favour.

Furthermore, the tenacity and success with which the prosecution of political corruption will be able to proceed in the future requires the redress of a number of substantial legislative failings. These include inadequate provisions for commissions of inquiry, courts and investigative bodies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation that are open to nepotistic appointments, and a legislative position of public officials that places them beyond the scope of some forms of legal scrutiny. Whether the Lokpal bill will be passed, and its associated ombudsman proven effective remains to be seen. The bill's critics argue quite reasonably that the omniscient scrutiny of a central ombudsman potentially trades one form of despotism for another, and it is prudent to ask whether the commission can itself remain immune from corruption, even if the institution were theoretically powerful.

Certainly, many of the proposals in Hazare's original bill have been considerably diluted in the version presented before parliament and the composition of the ombudsman will be a matter of intense scrutiny in coming months. As admirable as Hazare's campaign has been, the wider struggle against state corruption in India is unlikely to be fulfilled by the Lokpal alone.

The global authority which the nation is likely to wield in coming years is only to be lauded if power and prosperity is distributed more evenly within India itself: a challenge which requires a serious engagement with the problems of state corruption. Whilst the task facing the Indian state is indeed substantial, the recent popular outcry shows that the country is rich in the popular will to enact such reforms. **C**

Dr. Andrew Sanchez is a specialist in the anthropology of class and labour, organised crime and corruption.



The London School of Economics study that India might never be a superpower was given a prominent place in almost all the major Indian newspapers. An impression was created that India, had a national goal to become a superpower, a goal that it would never be able to achieve due to its many failings. The details were sketchy and arguments not properly summed up. Many readers thought it was another attempt by a western institution to belittle India.

In a climate of uncontrolled corruption, non-government, policy paralysis and uninspiring leadership the national mood was already depressed and the media reporting of the LSE study further dampened it.

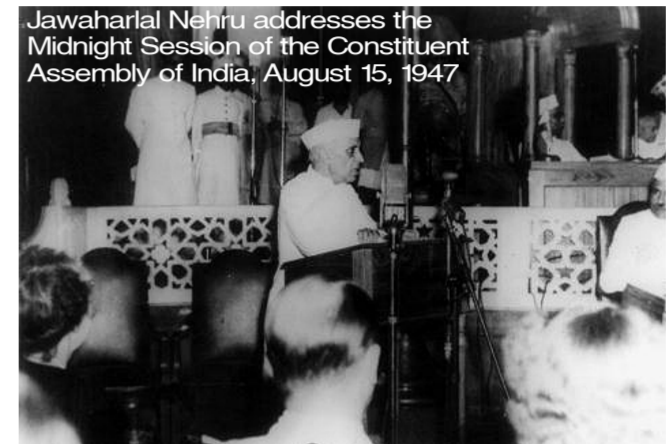
Scholarly studies are balanced and more carefully worded than the casual media reporting. The study, in fact, seemed to be a reminder to the US policy makers who expect India to be an assertive regional superpower.

The editor, Nicholas Kitchen wrote: "India's rise in geostrategic terms is rendered all the more significant since its power resides at the confluence of the United States' two great hegemonic challenges: counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the management of China's growing regional assertiveness. If India's proud non-alignment during the Cold War had given it a leadership role in

the developing world, its 21st century position places it at the heart of superpower geopolitics... The United States, in particular, is placing India at the very heart of its strategic reorientation—and with it, the orientation of the rest of the world—towards Asia."

It's a strange expectation. The question must be asked

INDIA MIGHT NEVER BE A SUPERPOWER



Jawaharlal Nehru addresses the Midnight Session of the Constituent Assembly of India, August 15, 1947

why should India serve the interests of the United States, who has historically been the biggest supporter or rather sustainer of Pakistan and its military dictators? True that India had come closer to America in recent years, but the relations between the world's two largest democracies are still overshadowed by past mistrust.

Burdened by many pressing domestic concerns, India doesn't have ambition or national will to throw its weight around as a global superpower. Therefore, the main assumption of the LSE study is rather unrealistic. In fact, the Indian policy makers had repeatedly stressed in the past that they would not like to emulate other superpowers—threatening neighbours, carving out spheres of influence, sponsoring military uprisings, sustaining friendly dictators and overturning ideologically unsuitable democracies.

That didn't mean that India never wanted to play a larger role in global affairs. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal

Nehru conceived that role carefully and tried to discharge it honestly. Call him naive or idealist, he saw no conflict between national interest and global interests.

Just before the independence of India in March 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, then interim prime minister of India, defined the role that India was to play in the changing world.

Addressing the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi Nehru said: "one of the notable consequences of the European domination of Asia has been the isolation of the countries of Asia... In this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together in a common task..." And that common task was to create a community of nations in which all nations were to be equal partners in the pursuit of freedom, democracy, co-existence, mutual respect and economic emancipation.

Nehru made another perceptible comment in Bandung Conference, 1955, about what superpowers are capable of. He said: "The mistakes of my country and perhaps the mistakes of other countries here do not make a difference; but the mistakes the Great Powers make do make a difference to the world and may well bring about a terrible catastrophe."

History proved him right. One superpower, the Americans, left a trail of catastrophic devastation from Vietnam to Nicaragua, while the other, the Soviet Union, wrecked brutal suppression in places like Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan.

India's journey has been a unique journey. No other country in the world with so many competing and balancing diversities has been able to sustain a liberal democracy. The LSE study acknowledges this fact as one of its authors Prof Ramchandra Guha writes: "We should judge ourselves not against the achievements, real or imagined, of other countries, but in the light of our own norms and ideals... We are a unique nation, unique for refusing to reduce Indian-ness to a single language, religion, or ideology, unique in affirming and celebrating the staggering diversity found within our borders (and beyond them)."**C**

After spending almost 10 weeks in India I am back to London. I travelled across 7 states (UP, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat) and the Union territory

and manicured gardens, tasteful lighting and dirt-free pavements. It was bursting with Buddhist tourists from China and Japan. It's perhaps the only place in India where you have more Chinese food

streets. The 'communities of shit makers' that VS Naipaul noticed in the early sixties are still existing and even thriving in many parts of India.

It was painful to see people urinating just

WHY INDIA LACKS SANITATION AND HYGIENE

of Pondyicherry. I took nine flights and travelled some 3,000 km by car on some of the newest expressways. Thanks to 1500 photographs, the visit is fairly well documented.

I witnessed the arrogance of money and power among Delhiwallas. I observed peaceful co-existence of poverty and affluence in Mumbai. I visited the wonderful temple towns of Madurai and Thanjavur in Tamilnadu. I saw the spotless blue sea and the house of our legendary former President Kalam in Rameswaram.

In Gujarat I visited Baroda where I saw some of the greatest works of Indian art, the paintings of goddess Lakshmi and Swarasati by Raja Ravi Verma. Next door to the Baroda Museum was the extraordinary palace of the Maharaja of Baroda. The entrance ticket was priced at Rs 150, more expensive than Tajmahal and the Caves of Ajanta.

The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya, Bihar, was surrounded by sufficient green-



Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya

restaurants than the curry restaurants. I also visited the nearby town of Gaya, where Hindus do to perform 'pinda-daana' of their dead parents and family elders so that their soul could be finally emancipated from the cycle of rebirth. Like many other Hindu temple towns its streets were dotted with garbage, cow dung and dog shit.

And that brings me to one of my main concerns about India - the lack of sanitation and hygiene. In fact, there is a remarkable unity of purpose among Indians when it comes to defecating or urinating in the

public toilets. The situation is really bad in India's poorest states. About 77% of homes in the eastern state of Jharkhand have no toilet facilities, while the figure is 76.6% for Orissa and 75.8% in Bihar.

So what could be done? One great example was provided by Anita Narre a poor woman from Madhya Pradesh. She left her husband Shivram's home two days after her marriage in May last year because the house had no toilet. She returned eight days later after Shivram, a daily wage worker, built a toilet in his home with his meagre savings.

An NGO, Sulabh International announced a \$10,000 reward for Mrs Narre for her "brave" decision and forcing her husband to build a toilet. Sulabh founder Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, who had launched a nationwide campaign to build toilets in poor homes and has build millions of toilets in poor homes, visited Narre's home to personally congratulate her. **C**

Dr Vijay Rana is the editor of www.nrfm.com and his blog is on www.indiabriefings.com. He also edits a free quarterly magazine called The Journal of Health & Happiness.



FOOD UNDER REVIEW

*If you are hungry and you eat, it's Prakriti (nature).
If you are hungry and you don't eat, it is Vikruti (Abnormality).
If you are hungry, but feed the needy, it is Sanskriti (Culture)*
—Ancient Indian saying

Bhakti Deodhar

Food is such an indispensable element of our life. We devote much of our time, energy and money on what we eat. But do we ever bother to wonder where our food comes from or how it is made? Unless you are led to believe (which I hope not) that supermarkets are the answer to all these questions, actually tracing the source of what ends up on our plates is indeed intriguing.

Last week a bunch of food enthusiasts indulged in a vigorous discussion exploring our eating habits, orders (and disorders), choices and preferences. The nuanced debate was facilitated by Sonal Patel, AFP Development Ambassador as part of the Gyaan Yatra project, which supports individuals like Sonal to raise awareness of global issues with the wider community.

Starting off the discussion, Sonal illustrated disturbing trends in current farming practices around the world. Most of our food—be it vegetables or meat—is sourced from developing countries in the world, whose economies are heavily dependent on the money earned through agricultural export. However these source lands have only limited resources to cope up with the ever-growing demands. In order to maximize output, the producers use more fertilizers, pesticides and other chemical aids which increase the production for a short span but damage the land permanently. And our quest for more food has only accelerated land degradation. As opposed to the \$9 billion of foreign aid allocated to small scale farming, a whopping \$252 billion of overseas development assistance is pumped in to boost industrial farming, which is anything but sustainable. It has aggravated the hardships of poor farmers at the other end of the food curve. Farmers in India, Kenya and other agro-based countries now prefer to grow cash crops like sugar beets and coffee beans, which promise more money, than rice and wheat, which are essential for their subsistence but are not commercially attractive. With less and less land left available for food grains, they become a rare and pricy resource. Local food prices shoot up alarmingly leading to inflation. The result—eighty percent of malnourished people in the global South are farmers and their families whose meagre incomes cannot cope with the ballooning prices of staples.

The new global drive for bio-fuel (fuel made from crops such as rapeseed, corn and sugarcane) has made matters even worse for small scale farmers. This

was evident from the presentation of Jasber Singh, another AFP supporter, who unearthed some shocking facts on agricul-



Agricultural workers in Northern India

tural exploitation in India. In India the issue of food is inextricably linked with the issue of governance and social justice. Industrial giants such as Tata and Reliance are merging small, individually owned farms into sprawling industrial farming estates, which leaves farmers with little or no say in production and sales of the crops (mostly cash crops). It undermines their



Woman worker at an Indian poultry farm.

access to food and eventually their access to living. For the Adivasis' (tribal communities in India) the fight to preserve their lands and forests from being converted into

giant sites of contract farming has become a struggle for survival. For them, the right to food is inextricably linked with the

owned farms into sprawling industrial farming estates leaving indigenous farmers destitute. The meat that we consume is also a result of an equally, if not more, unjust cultivation. Jonty Whittleton, a digital sustainability campaigner from Compassion In World Farming led the discussion to the animal abuse on the farms. Sixty billion animals are farmed every year in the world and two-thirds of them subjected to 'factory farming'. The competition to produce inexpensive meat, eggs and dairy products prompts farm keepers to treat animals as commodities. They are cramped in overcrowded cages in farm 'factories' (an egg-laying hen is confined to as little as an A4 size space in a small pen!) and raised in the most inhuman conditions to be slaughtered eventually.

Unethical farming systems tell us a horrendous story that has to be brought to an end. Advocating ethical farming can very well be demonstrated at an individual level. Starting with little but meaningful changes in our daily diet such as eating less meat, not wasting food, preferring ethically sourced food, wherever and whenever possible can go a long way to influence the food retailers to resort to fairer treatment of farming communities and animals.

On a larger level our collective voice can be instrumental in lobbying national and international governments and other decision making bodies for just food policies. A recent nation-wide campaign for 'right to food' in India launched by non-governmental networks is a step taken in this direction. The campaign solicits support from individuals in India and abroad for an e-petition demanding robust mechanisms to ensure food entitlements to the poor in India. The petition, addressed to the Prime Minister, can be a very effective tool to channelise public pressure for responsive and responsible policies.

The discussion ended with many questions on our unanswered but certainly made us aware of our responsibility and power as consumers. The message I took away that evening was a quote by Jonty: 'With each and every meal we cast a vote on how the food industry will behave', recalling the Sanskriti in the ancient wisdom tale quoted above. **C**

country hosting 40% of world's billionaires, shocking, isn't it?

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owned farms into sprawling industrial farming estates leaving indigenous farmers destitute.

Unethical farming systems tell us a horrendous story that has to be brought to an end. Advocating ethical farming can very well be demonstrated at an individual level. Starting with little but meaningful changes in our daily diet such as eating less meat, not wasting food, preferring ethically sourced food, wherever and whenever possible can go a long way to influence the food retailers to resort to fairer treatment of farming communities and animals.

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Bhakti Deodhar is a Gyaan Yatra volunteer



THE CRITICAL MUSLIM

It is increasingly tough being a young Muslim in South Africa. So much of my religion's clear views on tolerance of debate and opposing views are misunderstood—often as equally by those inside the camp as outside it

Kalim Rajab

Perhaps nowhere is this brought into such sharp relief as on the issue of Salman Rushdie, the hugely controversial author whose presence, or lack of it, caused such uproar last month at the Jaipur Literary Festival, which I attended.

Jaipur is the world's premier literary event. Yet as it was besieged by the threat of violence by unknown elements, I was forced to re-examine the nature of creativity, censorship and dissent—especially for modern Muslims. Knowing just how much controversy Rushdie had elicited for over 20 years in the Muslim community in South Africa, I asked a fellow South African, also a young and educated Muslim like me, for her views. Well, she said, betraying her pluralistic outlook, I feel very sad that he was not allowed to attend. But she quickly added that she wouldn't publicly voice these opinions back home in order to respect her parents' views.

As much as her first statement gave me hope that perhaps a softening in young Muslim attitudes was imminent, so her caveat threatened to make my hopes stillborn.

Yet for us Muslim South Africans, it needn't be this way.

I am severely tested by Salman Rushdie. He is my favourite writer, an "imaginist" whose impregnable, dreamlike, multi-layered and sweeping prose has transformed the very essence of writing. There is little exaggeration in this statement—as anyone who could scarcely have believed that such a book as *Midnight's Children* was possible, will testify. There is universality to his genius which led, at Jaipur, to the finest authors, thinkers and bibliophiles in the world unflinchingly finding common cause with him and his travails. His backdrop is that of the unsettled world of the immigrant. His concepts are ones which confront all migrants, disillusioned with both cultures they continually traverse between: the insufficient one from the old world which they are bound up in, and the alienating one they join. All of us, depending on how far back we travel, are immigrants; and all of our kin have faced the questions of identity and alienation and the struggles for conformity which he/she dreams of. Few authors before or since have been able to express this disorientation as powerfully as Rushdie has done, or to express such empathy with immigrants' experiences.

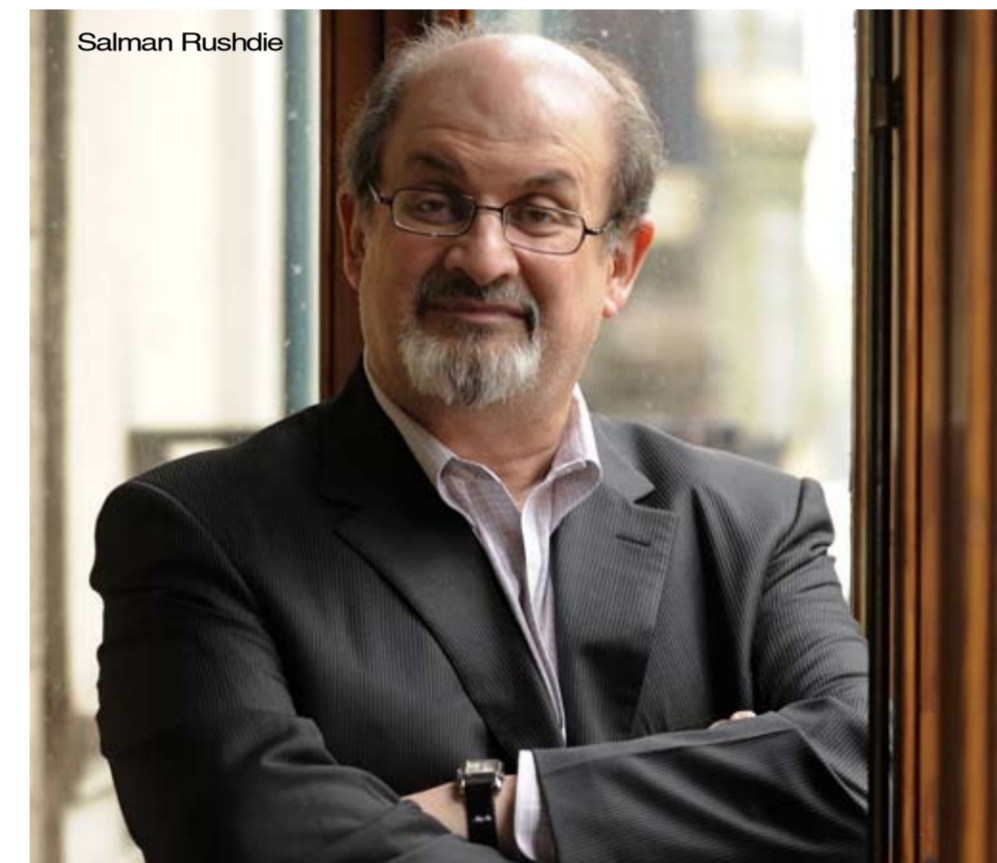
To read and love Rushdie, then, is to swirl in fragile ideas and to delight in daring thought.

But, as a Muslim, to read *The Satanic Verses* is also the ultimate experience in tolerance. Again, this is no exaggeration. In

it, amidst numerous dreamlike sequences in which reality is indistinguishable from the imaginary, the very essence of Islam is called into question. The Prophet Muhammad is a false prophet. He is a manipulative, deceitful man little suited to God's great purpose. The Archangel Gabriel is a weak creature easily turned from his true task. The Divine Revelations from God are miscommunicated, doctored, and worse, are made up by a man to suit his requirements. After the Prophet's jubilant entry into Mecca, the resentful Meccans secretly keep a brothel filled with 12 prostitutes, each one named after and mimicking the personalities of the Prophet's wives. Upon his death, it is

But does it matter?

As a Muslim, I feel little need to feel insecure about an idea, as demeaning and blasphemous as it may be. My faith is far too entrenched to feel threatened by an opposing viewpoint, or an artist's licence. The Prophet of my faith believed in the unerring centrality of ideas, the better when the power of these ideas could wash away closed thinking. He never closed down debate. Throughout his life, he was subjected to ritual humiliation, but he never succumbed to wanting to murder as revenge for it. He never condoned the killing of those who opposed him. Rather, he taught peace, and that all abuse should be borne by patience. And, ironically, this



"ULTIMATELY, IF WE ARE TO BE CRITICAL MUSLIMS OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY IN THIS COUNTRY, WE NEED TO BE SECURE ENOUGH IN OUR FAITH NOT TO INSTINCTIVELY RESORT TO ANGER AND VIOLENCE WHEN OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS ARE AIRED—NO MATTER HOW DISTASTEFUL..."

suggested that one of the heathen goddesses is the female equivalent of God. And then, in its denouement, it is all conveniently revealed to be a nightmare and not in fact the truth. (A little too conveniently, like Pam waking up in *Dallas* to find out that the entire Season 8 was a dream.)

All these ideas are extremely hurtful to Muslims and demeaning to their faith as at face value it insults their Prophet and calls the divinity of their religion into question.

is ultimately Rushdie's message—articles of faith are inherently strong enough to withstand attacks on them, no matter how radical they may be.

Young Muslims in South Africa face a momentous test. Post-apartheid democracy has unleashed a myriad of long-denied opportunities for us. We are free to go to whichever universities we like, to choose whichever professions we like, to think what we like, to socialise and live amongst whomever we choose. Many of

our parents were at the forefront of the opposition to apartheid, and they—like us now—subscribed to the notion of democracy, liberal values and free speech. Today I find it difficult in my community to find a Muslim of my generation and education levels who does not describe their political and value system as "liberal"—just look at personal homepages of Facebook or Twitter as an insight.

Yet being liberal bestows on it a multitude of responsibilities. It is not a passive belief system. One of the onuses is a belief in the right of free speech. And ultimately, if we think deeply enough about it, the right of free speech is only the right of free speech if it includes the right to offend.

Offence is not comfortable to live with, but it is something which allows societies—and religions—to advance. Many of the great Islamic civilisations, from the Abbassids in Arabia to the Safavids of Persia, from the era of al-Andalus to the Ottoman period, were great because they weren't content with the worlds and societies which they found. Instead, they were instilled with a deep desire to push forward the boundaries of all that had come before them. In all of these Islamic civilisations, the influence of alternative thought, of satirists and those who pushed the envelope on conventional thought, was indulged and given loose rein. Perhaps it was because the Muslim intellectuals of those civilisations realised that their Prophet was the ultimate radical of his day, bringing with him such distasteful ideas to his society that he was initially shunned by it.

Young Muslims may choose not to subscribe to this view of offence—but then they should not call themselves liberal. Ultimately, if we are to be critical Muslims of the twenty first century in this country, we need to be secure enough in our faith not to instinctively resort to anger and violence when opposing viewpoints are aired—no matter how distasteful. We may not like it, and sometimes we may be deeply offended by it, as in the case of Rushdie. But this does not mean that we should not allow it to be aired. This is the true test of freedom of speech and for me that it is the test of being a critical Muslim. **C**

Kalim Rajab was educated at the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford. He has worked in the diamond industry in London and now works in financial services in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.





I am sitting in a tent amidst crowds of interested people who have gathered to hear a panel discussion on Women Writing Conflict. There are three of us who have written on one or the other aspect of women struggling under oppressive political, social and cultural regimes. They have written about the marginalisation of women due to caste and class and mysogyny and I am speaking about the struggle of SA women from Valliamah in the days of Gandhi to post democracy. Many were visibly moved by the stories emanating from the TRC as they imbibed the pain of our struggle and made it one with theirs.

I write this column from the Jaipur Literary Festival in India. It is the biggest and most amazing gathering of intellectual giants, novelists, poets, spiritual gurus, women activists, film directors, journalists, editors of leading newspapers and magazines and opinion makers. Dubbed the greatest literary show on Earth, it is indeed an awe-inspiring experience. At a given moment, one felt like being at a football match in long queues to enter the venue. At another moment as one finally entered the grounds of the Diggi Palace one felt like royalty in the midst of opulence. As one mingled amongst the grand crowds of celebrities and literary icons intertwined with the Delhi jet set, one felt like being at a fashion show. I see Ben Okri, Tom Stoppard, Mark Tully, William Dalrymple and in my mind I transport this idea to my home country. And then there was the music and the side shows and bookstores and the fashion houses and the eateries. Book lovers piled over each other to catch a glimpse of their idols. When Oprah Winfrey entered sariclad and bedecked with flowers the young fans filled the venue with exuberance. One placard read: "Oprah, I have waited 10 years for 1 minute of your time." But many sceptics were able to see through the superficial sensationalism and simply dismissed her visit as one with little gravitas to the Indian psyche. "She desperately needs a new constituency and India can offer her an opportunity to reinvent herself, says the editor of a leading womens

magazine. In another tent there was much interest in Amy Chua, of the *Battle Hymn Of The Tiger Mom*, fame. Her brutally honest account of the militarist model of parenting she followed has jumpstarted a two toned leather jacket and vertiginous heels rather than the conventional picture of a stodgy academic. In other tents Steven Pinker, the Harvard Professor of cognitive psychol-

AT THE JAIPUR LITERARY FESTIVAL

magazine. In another tent there was much interest in Amy Chua, of the *Battle Hymn Of The Tiger Mom*, fame. Her brutally honest account of the militarist model of parenting she followed has jumpstarted



"I CAME HERE TO LOSE MYSELF IN ORDER TO FIND MYSELF, SAID ONE PARTICIPANT AND I THINK THAT IS JUST WHAT THIS FESTIVAL IS ALL ABOUT..."

a global debate on effective parenting methods. And so I joined the crowds to hear Chua argue her defence before the bench, presided by veteran journalist Madhu Trehan with the audience for jury. Contrary to expectation Chua was no 'snarling Maoist mother'. As a Yale University Law Professor she broke every stereotype appearing as a fashion model in

two toned leather jacket and vertiginous heels rather than the conventional picture of a stodgy academic.

In other tents Steven Pinker, the Harvard Professor of cognitive psychol-

that empower women are less violent in every way. At first his claim that violence is on the decrease seemed bizarre but as he listed one interesting statistic after another his arguments began to have some plausibility. He pointed out that death caused by violence as a percentage of all deaths has declined dramatically over the centuries. Tribal warfare was nine times as deadly as war and genocide in the 20th century. Similarly the murder rate in medieval Europe was more than thirty times what it is today. Citing from a study written by John Mueller and Mark Stewart he claims that there are more chances of Americans dying in a bath tub (1 in 950,000) than in a terror attack (1 in 3.5 million). A subject as vast as history of violence cant really be summarised in one short session but Pinker left the audience with something to think about. For example he stated that major forces for peace included general commerce. "The US and China may have differences over trade but they make all our stuff and we owe them too much money and so cooperation is more likely than conflict."

In the entire spectrum of ideas and thoughts Deepak Chopra provided spiritual upliftment in his neo scientific exploration of religious consciousness, while Gulzar spoke of love and others of loyalty to national idols like Gandhi. In a panel discussion the controversial book on Gandhi was discussed with Joseph Lelyveld claiming to an edgy audience that though he was 'an admirer of Gandhi he was not an Indian loyalist'.

Throughout the festival there were grave tensions caused by the 'Rushdie L'affaire', but though this caused untold inconveniences to the organisers and behind the scene bargaining fiascos with fundamental groups and government officials, the audience was left with the challenges of having to defend secularism, freedom of the media, freedom of thought and literary liberation.

I came here to lose myself in order to find myself, said one participant and I think that is just what this festival is all about. What I took back from this amazing festival was how so few people could do so much with the aid of volunteers. Every session started on time though there were over 75,000 people at various times. Using this model as an example the Harvard Business School is embarking on a case study of this successful initiative. Indeed there is much that we can learn from it as well. **C**

Dr. Devi Rajab is a leading South African journalist and can be reached at rajab@cybertek.co.za

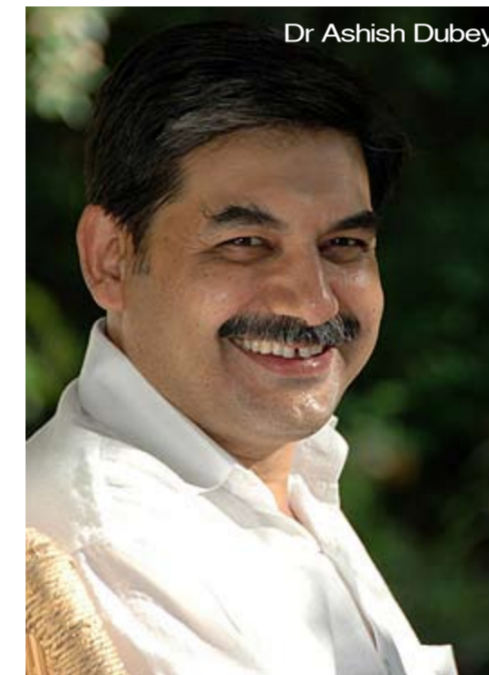
"GONE TO THE UNSEEN"—RUMI

A peek into the world of a physicist-philosopher

by Deepa Vanjani

At the beginning of this year, Caroline and Matt from the USA saw the photograph entitled 'song of the reeds' and decided to get it painted into a 6x4 feet painting by Leah Tumerman. The man behind the photograph is Dr Ashish Dubey and this particular photograph was published in the National Geographic Magazine [NGM] and then featured in the 101 best shots, a special edition of the NGM, 'Your Shot', that showcased the best photographs selected from among more than 100,000 pictures.

Dr. Ashish Dubey, professor of Physics at an Indore-based college, with a PhD in Non Linear Optics, has a passion for photography. This passion has led him to explore the unexplored from behind his lens and found him a place at the Gadfly Art Gallery at Perth Australia, the Mint Gallery at New Delhi (reviewed by Uma Nair in 'Asian Age'), the Oberoi Art camp



at Mumbai (the finale was telecast on NDTV 'Good Times'), the art workshop at the Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Art of Living Foundation, Bangalore, and the art camp at Vadodara organised by 'Uttrayan'. (For more details visit his website www.dubeyashish.com).

Art can thus grip the imagination of different people hailing from different corners of the world, people with multifarious concerns, and make them interact on one level and can also be personalized by them for a closer communion with it. Photography as an art can be a challenge, for one is, after all, using a gadget to capture a fleeting moment for posterity. The art comes in when the photographer perceives what he or she wishes to shoot much before the actual process of taking the picture has begun. It is more in the mind than in the camera. "To be able to achieve this one has to learn to see. "Seeing happens when you are ready to become

nothing, when you lose reference. That is the point where His (the Almighty's) art begins," says Dr. Dubey. Uninvolved seeing enables one to see and that kind of detached viewing is more important than anything else. There is a beautiful domin-

Ashish's photographs are imbued with silence and stillness. Silence for him is not the state of noiselessness; this is a silence that communicates; only one has to be able to listen. Stillness itself seems to have been frozen for eternity in the photographs.



in the existing frame which is in the mind and that is where art begins.

It is reminiscent of Carlos Castaneda's words in *A Separate Reality*, "Seeing is learnt by seeing...when you see...the world is incredible. Seeing makes one realize the unimportance of everything."

Most of his work comprises of abstractions drawn from the reservoir of nature. From here he takes off to make his photography into an art form, a concept still at a nascent stage in India. His contemplation is that one has to be free of the "definitional traps" in order to be able to reach the core

of art and appreciate it.

Dr Dubey doesn't enhance the pictures using Photoshop. He retains their original flavor, the essence of god's Photoshop. Most photographs capture the moods of the sun at different times of the day, different weather conditions, different locales and different seasons. And thus the play of colour—hues as grey, black, blue, orange, ochre, yellow give a backdrop to his photographs with the verisimilitude of a painting. The complexion of Krishna, 'Shyam Sanwra', comes alive in a photograph, deep blue; it takes one into a mystic realm. Yet another photograph, though colored has gone on to give a monochrome effect. And mostly it is the water surface which attracts Ashish for the duality ends in the surface of the water and one can see shadow and real together.

As one sees the photographs one goes through a gamut of emotions to finally arrive to a verity of a different kind. The photograph of the placid surface of the Sirpur Lake (the one published in NGM) at Indore catches the reeds in the early morning sun. In finality, the finished work gives a very different impression. Myriad layers of interpretation can be drawn out by a viewer. Human figurines, abstract motifs, geometrical patterns, all seem to merge into one-an interplay of the viewer's perception and interpretation and the photographer's artistry. This is where the imagination of the artist steps in for here he has to go beyond aperture, shutter speed, metering or the lens type. "One has to get out of mindsets to perceive", says Dr Dubey and this is one reason he never names his photographs for he believes that with words come in dogmas and with dogmas original ideas are lost. Sublimation of the senses!

Also most of his work is impromptu. "What is planned for sure is that there is no plan", he says adding jocularly 'que sera sera...'

The photographer and his vision fuse to take the onlooker on a journey that is personal for no photograph has a common interpretation. At the end it is the viewer's involvement with it coming from how he/she sees it. "Two drifters off to see the world, there is such a lot of world to see..." sings Frank Sinatra in the song 'Moon River'. It is up to us whether we are indeed able to 'see' the world! **C**
Deepa Vanjani is assistant professor at a leading college in Indore, India and guest faculty at Educational Media Research Centre, University Teaching Department, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore.



RABINDRANATH TAGORE ON SCIENCE: A TRIBUTE ON HIS 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Sisir K. Majumdar

A close study of the intellectual renaissance which occurred in India during the second half of the nineteenth century, flowing into the twentieth is vital in order to understand Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), one of the makers of Modern India. It was within this renaissance that a creative synthesis of the best of the East and the West took place in science, art, literature and culture. Rabindranath was the symbol of that great synthesis—the personification of supreme intellect, his name being synonymous with genius. The first Nobel Laureate in Asia and Africa in 1913 (in Literature for his book: “Gitanjali” - ‘Offering of Songs’) was not only a poet, a philosopher, an artist, but also an ardent propagator of popular science in order to eradicate age-old irrational superstition among his people.

Rabindranath is India’s greatest modern poet and the most brilliant creative genius produced by the Indian Renaissance. As well as poetry, he wrote songs, stories and novels, plays, essays, memoirs and travelogues. He was both a restless innovator and a superb craftsman. His poetry has an impressive wholeness: a magnificent loving warmth, a compassionate universal humanism, a delicate sensuousness, an intense kinship with nature and a burning awareness of man’s place in the universe. He moves with effortless ease from the literal to the symbolic, from the part to the whole, from a tiny detail to the vast cosmos. His sense of science and its spirit is thematically reflected in his writings.

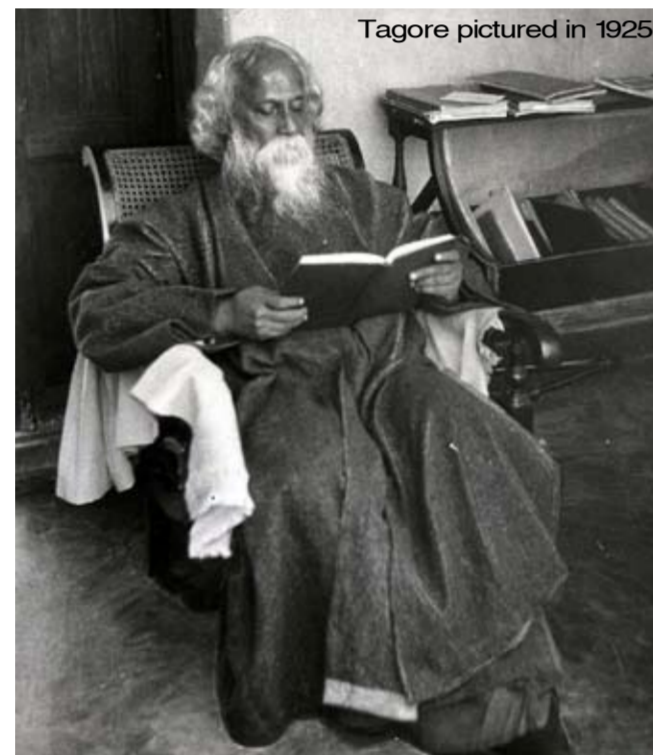
At the very dawn of the Indian Renaissance, Rabindranath came in close contact with the rising scientists of India—Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy (1861-1944), and Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman (1888-1970), the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930 for his Raman Effect and also Professor of Physics at the University of Calcutta, Meghnad Saha (1893-1956) Acharya “Sattyanandranath Bose (1894-1974), Dr. Mohammed Kudsir-e-Khuda, Professor of Chemistry, Presidency College, Calcutta, and others.

Rabindranath’s Scientific Writings Were All In Bengali

Rabindranath’s interest in science can be traced to his early teens. He loved astronomy, and when in England many years later, visited the Greenwich Observatory. Eminent astrophysicist, Meghnad Saha, persuaded him to write a book—rather a booklet—in Bengali (“VISHVA-PARICHAYA”-‘Introducing the Universe’, 1937) which he dedicated to Satyendranath Bose, Father of Boson and of Bose. He collaborated with one of his very close family friends—Prashanta Chandra Mahalanobis, Professor of Physics and Statistics, Presidency College, Calcutta, who became General Secretary of Vishva Bharati University in 1931. He had encounters with European scientists and scientifically minded philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Nobel Laureate in Literature, the German physicist, Arnold Johannes Wilhelm Sommerfeld (1868-1951), meeting him in Calcutta in 1928 and the famous German physicist and philosopher, Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-1976), Nobel Laureate in Physics 1932 (for his Uncertainty Principle). He met him in Calcutta at his Jorasanko house in 1928. Heisenberg is reported to have said in 1972 that Rabindranath’s philosophical ideas had been of help to him as a physicist. Heisenberg (the young scientist of 27 then) had several conversations with the mature poet (then 67) about relativity, incommensurability, interconnectedness and impermanence as fundamental aspects of physical reality. After the conversations he said: “Some of the ideas

that had seemed so crazy, suddenly made much sense. That was of great help for me.” His enduring fascination with the relationship between Man and Nature, notably in his Hibbert Lectures—“The Religion of Man” at Manchester College, Oxford University on May 19, 21, & 26, 1930—brought him close to Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Nobel Laureate in Physics, 1921. The Russian-Belgian scientist Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, 1977, remarked in 1984 that “Curiously enough, the present evolution of science is running in the direction stated by the great Indian poet. A magnificent tribute indeed!

In India the Santiniketan School (Established 1901- first as Brama Charya School) is the first institution where learning of science by direct practical experimentation was introduced at primary school level. In one of his essays, “SHIKSHA” (1906) Rabindranath wrote: “In order to teach science to youngsters, their eyes need to be opened up first and the power of observation enriched.” Thanks to



Rabindranath for his foresight!

Allusions and references to things scientific and medical fascinated both William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Rabindranath. There are plenty of them in their writings. Shakespeare was interested in health and sickness in his time (allusions in King Lear, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, Twelfth Night, and so on). Rabindranath’s interest was in contemporary sciences—astronomy, astrophysics biology, etc Allusions are spread in his novels, short stories, poems, essays, etc., written from his teens to almost the end of his life. Eminent Bengali writer and linguist, Syed Mustaba Ali, one of the closest students (1921-1926) of Rabindranath at his Santiniketan School recorded in one of his articles that he used to read books on science, physics, anthropology, chemistry, astronomy, regularly, sending them on to the school library.

All of Rabindranath’s writings containing references to things scientific are in his mother tongue—Bengali. This is a serious limitation to non-Bengali readers. Bengali, in terms of numbers of speakers, is the seventh most-spoken language in the world with about 200 million in India and Bangladesh and in several countries outside India (the United Kingdom, United States of America, Germany, France and Gulf countries). In order to get the real flavour and beauty of Rabindranath’s writings, one needs to read

them in the original; translations in* other languages are no substitute. Bertrand Russell appreciated Rabindranath’s poems, but wished he could have read them in Bengali.

First Writing On Science

It was written at the age of 13. It was about planets and their inhabitants (its Bengali title: “Grahagan Jiber Abashbhumi

The Poet And Copernicus

The European Renaissance (1500-1700 A.D.) threw off many myths concerning Nature. With the publication of “De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium” (On the Revolution of Celestial Spheres) by the Polish astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) in 1543, the myth of the geocentric universe (earth is the centre of the universe) was shattered and was replaced by the concept of the heliocentric universe (the sun is the centre of the universe, around which our planet earth moves). It was against Biblical preaching (as in other religions—Hinduism, Islam, etc). The Vatican rejected it. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the Italian astronomer, was a staunch supporter of the Copernican concept and was condemned by the Vatican in 1616 and 1633, and was put under house arrest in Florence for the rest of his life. The poet, John Milton (1608-1674), though blind since 1652, went to see Galileo at Florence. Geordano Bruno (1548-1600) extended the concepts of Copernicus by suggesting that the universe was infinite and thus paved the way for Galileo, Johann Kepler (1571-1630), Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) and Isaac Newton (1642-1727). Bruno was a churchman, but still he was burnt at the stake as a heretic for supporting the ideas of Copernicus.

The heliocentric universe concept of Copernicus did not escape the attention of the poet. He expressed the whole concept of Copernicus in a beautiful way in his poem “BASUNDHARA” (1893) in his book of poems “SONARTARI” (1894) :

*You, my earth are many years old
Taking me on your lap, aligning with the infinite sky
Going round and round with your untiring legs
Around the solar system—innumerable days and nights
through the ages...*

Rabindranath was totally free from superstitions, religious or otherwise. In his poem “BASUNDHARA” he totally rejected the geocentric concept of the universe postulated by the Egyptian astronomer and geographer of antiquity, Claudius Ptolemaeus (c.A.D.100-c.170) in his “Almagest”. According to his theory, the Earth is the centre of the universe with the Sun, Moon and Stars revolving around it. The poet poetically accepted in the above poem the heliocentric concept of the universe proposed by Copernicus, Galileo and Bruno. He wrote eloquently about the fight of Bruno against religious superstition for which he gave his life.

The Poet And The Sun

In his poem “SABITRI” (1924), written on the ship to Buenos Aires (Argentina)—Haruna-Maru—on Sept, 26, 1924, the poet described how the Sun has kept his darling daughter, the mother Earth, alive and kicking with the gift of his enormous rays. In the preamble to the poem, he gave an account of how different elements—Hydrogen, Helium, etc. are constantly generating profuse heat and high temperature. In that gaseous melee, the poet imagined the presence of “Saraswati”—the goddess of learning with

violin in her hand. He felt the influence of solar power within himself and introduced himself to the reader:

*“...This life is a torn tude of your flute,
A trail of tunes in the confluence of our existence,
Smilingly floating in the stream in a game,
The mother earth amusingly embraced it,
Who knows what you gave me from the storage of glow
and glare...”*

This was the poet’s very personal way of expressing his profound gratitude, acute appreciation and indebtedness to the mighty Sun, donor of all energy and power to Mother Earth. What an astonishing sense of science!

In another poem ‘AWBHANI’ (1924) written on the ship Haruna-Maru on October 1, 1924, the poet admitted the influence of solar power in the very core of his mindset.

*“. In this darkness of mother earth who is that
enlightened composing sons,
Inviting others in every shade of light with burning
and glowing eyes,
That is why romance arises in the deep darkness of
the soil, in the excited grasses,
The earth rises with cries, ray of life spreads in
all directions...”*

He was familiar with the famous physics textbooks of Adoiphe Ganot (1804-1887) that ruled European schools and undergraduate classes for many decades, and on which all Bengali physics text books were modelled till 1898. Tagore’s acquaintance with Ganot is apparent from a passing reference to Ganot and the German physicist, Herman Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz (1821-1894), the inventor of the ophthalmoscope, in the famous satirical poem, “UNNATILAKSHAN” (‘Signs of Progress’) included in his book of poems, “KALPANA” (1900). Shortly after his return from the momentous tour of Europe and the U.S.A. in 1914, the poet wrote a delightful essay—“AMARJAGAT” (‘My World’), the theme of which is a mock debate between a poet and his scientist friend.

Science In Satires

Intellectual satires in his works are very well informed and based on facts and not fiction. In one of his classic novels, “SESHER-KABITA” (1928) the hero Arnit Ray, while addressing the Labanya as Banya in her maternal aunt Jogamay’s house, insisted that the same person may be addressed by different names in different places and in different contexts, and this is relativity of names.

He tells Labanya that he wants to be famous by preaching “Relativity of Names”; he also mentions the time-space relation and time dilation as thought by Einstein. (SHESHER KABITA, VISVABHARATI, 1929, p. 53-54.) It was a time when the Special Theory of Relativity by Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was a talk of the day in science, arts, philosophy, sociology, theology and so on. It stole people’s hearts; it spoke the language of their lips, it sang the song of their souls and it played the music of their minds. Such an epoch-making event, the Special Theory of Relativity cannot and did not escape the attention of Rabindranath.

In another context in Shesherkabita Labanya (Banya) is sitting alone under a tree and is tearing grass; suddenly Arnit (Mita) appeared on the scene and commented “Labanya’s study of the Botany of grass did not proceed any further.”

In another conversation, the very basic concept of the relationship of man, universe and velocity (E = MCZ: E = energy, M = mass, C = velocity of light) found literary expression in the shortening and lengthening of names. He made the complex theory of Relativity easy for all of us. Einstein’s Theory of Relativity got a new popular dimension in the poet’s classic, “Shesherkabita”.(p. 54 q.v.).

*“. Time should not mean the same to everybody. The
conventional clock gives one time relative to space, but the
personal clock which controls the Universe, gives another.*

This is what Einstein thinks.”

There are many such scientific satires in his works.

Tagore, Thermodynamics And Entropy

Rabindranath had a wide and diverse interest in science. In his “PANCHADIARY” (1895), he mentions if heat is the source of motion, then matter exists only when there is heat, matter moves and wind blows; if heat is exhausted, then everything comes to a standstill. The idea has a touch of the second law of thermodynamics which can be interpreted to mean that the entropy of a closed system tends towards a maximum and its available energy tends towards a minimum. It has been held that the Universe constitutes a thermodynamically closed system, and if this were true, it would mean that a time must finally come when the Universe unwinds itself, no energy being available for use. Heat and energy are convertible both ways. This state is referred to as the “Heat death of the Universe”. In his statement Rabindranath considers this aspect and expressed apprehension. It is by no means certain, however, that the Universe can be considered as a closed system in that sense. The Universe is still expanding. There might be many a Universe—multiverse might be the right expression.

Rabindranath And The Universe

The evidence of Rabindranath’s inquisitiveness about the planets, stars, etc. of the Universe is scattered in his writings of over 40 years, starting from “NAIBEDYA” (1901) to “JANMADIN” (1941). The cosmos and the Universe always roamed in the corridor of his mind: “What we mean by words like body, soul, mind: I don’t fathom, but I shall always observe the universe quietly, without words—the current of the cosmos’ awareness flows towards you.” (“Naibedy” Poem No. 88: Translation by Ketaki Kushari Dyson “Rabindranath Tagore: I Won’t Let You Go” Bloodaxe Books Ltd., Newcastle upon Tyne, 1991, p.125). The discovery of the power source of the vast universe and the changing structure of atoms in 1900 revolutionized our perception about things around us. There are reflections of this phenomenon in other poems of “Naibedy”:

*“. Body, mind and soul in unison -
What a beautiful display in my body
What a glow-what a burning light
In the eternal theatre of day and night.”*

*“. In the veins and arteries of my body
Flow the waves of life day and night,
That life is rushing to win the universe
That soul is dancing on the planet in beautiful tunes.”*

In his youth Rabindranath read about gravitation, life sciences, astronomy and mechanics of atoms. Protons and electrons are the foundation of all characteristics of the biological world.

A wonderful display in our own body. The poet imagined the main scientific entity between the cycles of creation and destruction, which are flowing eternally. He wrote in his poem “Nataraj” in “BANABANI” (1931) how electron rebels against the proton circling the proton and enriching itself rushes again to the centre of another proton:

*“. the rebel atom becomes beautiful in its dancing spree
Around the feet of the moonlight”*

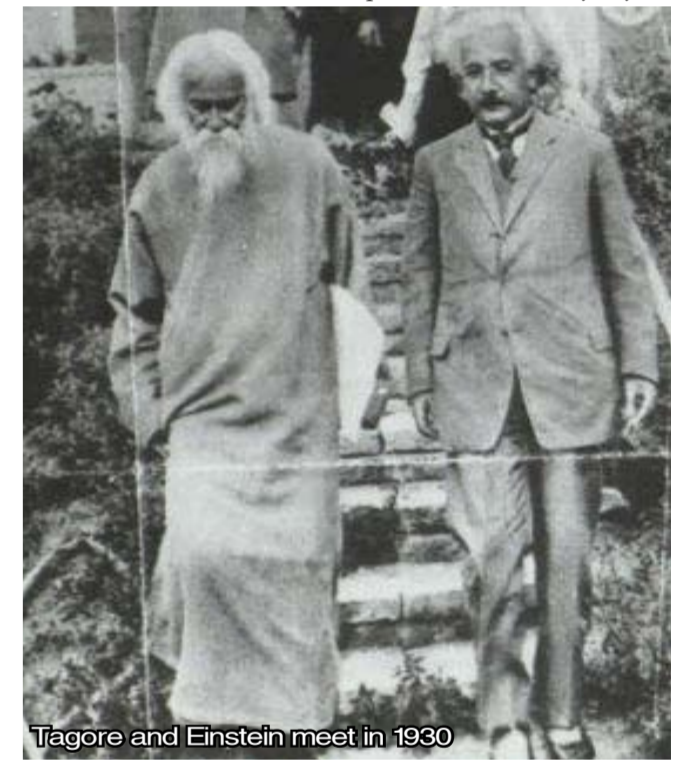
The poet contemplated on the uniqueness of the Grand/Intelligent Designer. In his classic novel “GORA” (1909) dedicated to his son, Rathindranath Thakur, Gora, the hero-enumerated different aspects of the uniqueness of the Grand Designer in His/Her Uni/Multiverse pointing out that science is breaking its head to explore the mystery (GORA, Rabindra Rachanabali (Collected Works of Rabindranath), Visvabharati Kolkata, Vol.

3, p.459, 1986). Rabindranath, in fact, thought of an assimilation of reality with scientific truth. This is an echo of his understanding about the nature of the elements creating the Uni/Multi/verse, a problem yet to be solved by science.

There are pertinent questions about the origin of the Universe and our place in it. When and how did it begin? Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? What is the nature of reality? Why are the laws of nature so finely tuned as to allow for the existence of beings like ourselves? And, finally, is the apparent ‘grand design’ of our Universe evidence for a benevolent creator who set things in motion? Or does science offer another explanation? The most fundamental questions about the origin of the Universe and of life itself, once the province of philosophy, now occupy the territory where scientists, philosophers and theologians meet—if only to disagree. It seems there is no one Universe. There is now a multiverse concept of reality, in which there are many Universes.

Rabindranath—the science conscious poet-philosopher, symbolically alluded to the Universe and our position in it in a myriad ways in his poems, songs, dramas, novels and in popular science writings.

Who is the Intelligent/Grand Designer of the Uni/Multiverse? A million dollar question! In the odyssey of



“HIS/HER” discovery, the caravan of scientists, poet-philosophers, theologians, and so on, starting from Newton, Rabindranath, Einstein to Stephen Hawking (1942 onwards) stopped abruptly at the periphery and did not proceed any further to the centre of the question.

Tagore & Einstein: Philosophy Of Science

Albert Einstein and Rabindranath are legendary figures, whose reputation endures into the twenty-first century. Einstein and Tagore met four times, the first time in 1926 in Germany. Their first conversation about the nature of reality took place on July 14, 1930, during his second visit at Einstein’s home at Kaputh, Potsdam, near Berlin. It was reported in the New York Times by the journalist Dmitri Marianoff (Einstein’s stepson-in-law): “It was interesting to see them together; Tagore—the poet, with the head of a thinker—and Einstein, the thinker with the head of a poet. It seemed to an observer as though two planets were engaged in a chat.”

Dr. Sisir K.Majumdar is founder/director of the Majumdar Institute of History, Sociology and philosophy of Science and Health Sciences, Kolkata, India. Translations from Bengali to English by Dr.Majumdar

(To be continued in the next issue)

TAGORE'S WOMEN

THE VAULT AT SOUTHWARK PLAYHOUSE, LONDON

Purnjanam/Born Again by Sharmila Chauhan *Endless Light* by Sayan Kent

The two dramas incorporated into 'Tagore's Women' feature feminist sensibilities. The philosophical language is poetic, challenging and filled with irony

Review by Mark Eaton

Gary Pillai and Rebecca Grant in *Endless Light* by Sayan Ken (Photo: Robert Workman)



The Kali Theatre Company has a reputation for discovering and nurturing female writers. Sharmila Chauhan and Sayan Kent have each been invited to create a drama inspired by the works of a Bengali Polymath, the legendary Rabindranath Tagore. An incredibly talented man, famous as a poet, playwright, novelist, music composer and painter, but was he also a feminist?

The productions share the same cast of six actors and both are staged under the arches of a railway bridge. The dark, damp and cavernous environment complements the minimalist designs by Molly Einchcomb and subtle lighting from Richard Howell.

The first presentation, *Purnjanam/Born Again*, is directed by Janet Steel and is set in a temple during a terrorist attack. The rumbling from the overhead trains generates an apocalyptic atmosphere.

A mysterious Flower Girl (Goldy Natay) arranges a romantic reunion for a man and woman, who have never physically expressed their love. Dharmesh Patel performs the role of Muna, who wants his suitor to be pure and chaste, but continually discloses his passionate dreams. He demonstrates an ability to privately connect with the soul of his character. The actor maintains a composed intensity with dark penetrating eyes that betray his burning carnal desire for Muni, played by the exquisite Rebecca Grant.

The actress has exotic features that flicker with the frustration aroused by Muna's unfulfilling foreplay. Muni wishes to abandon her innocent virtues and offers him the chance to see her nude. She clasps the collar of her fur coat, shifts her bare legs, plays a smile across her lips and permits time for the naked imagery dancing in his mind to overwhelm him. This is retribution for all of his false promises and she laughs when revealing a concealed floral dress. Her cruel strategy is indicative of an empowered woman.

Following a car accident, three sinners are trapped in limbo between life and death. They are locked in forward facing vertical coffins with windows at head height. The Flower Girl will revive them if her prisoners all agree they are worth saving, but must confess their secrets. The actors display an extensive range of amusing mannerisms. They also create a stimulating dialogue, which explores the subject of mortality.

The cast return for the second presentation, *Endless Light*, which is directed by Elizabeth Freestone. The action is set inside the mines of a sacred

mountain, which are convincingly created by the gravel floor and water dripping from above. Goldy Notay plays Chandra, a rugged, feisty and determined environmentalist, who hopes to save not only the mountain, but also her childhood memories that resonate through the landscape.

Chandra's sister, Nadia, has other ideas. She owns a business empire and intends to transform the mountain into a coal quarry. She wishes to destroy everything she loves, including the difficult relationship with her sister.

Rebecca Grant is brilliant as Nadia, the champagne quaffing sibling. When asked to wear a safety helmet she indignantly remarks, "Do you know how much this hair costs?" which says as much about her incredible wealth as it does her vanity.

Moreover, Nadia's seductive powers are enlivened by a sensual performance. In one moment of daring, she reclines her back into the dirt, points her foot up towards her guardian, raises her bottle and lets champagne cascade down the curve of her outstretched leg. Her protector rejects these advances, but is later consumed with jealousy as she pleasures her sister's boyfriend.

Robert Mountfound plays the promiscuous boyfriend, Red. His arrival at the mountain is a surprise to Chandra and she is too focussed on saving the land to accompany him at hospitality events. They seem to be incompatible and Red's romantic overtures appear superficial. He never removes his tuxedo and fails to support Chandra's campaign. He is happier taking advantage of the lavish gifts offered by Nadia. The actor crafts a weak man, which is consistent with all of the males in both productions.

The two dramas incorporated into *Tagore's Women* feature feminist sensibilities. The philosophical language is poetic, challenging and filled with irony. The Kali Theatre Company has succeeded in creating provocative plays, which both offer a feminist perspective on the work of Rabindranath Tagore.

Mark Eaton is a former Theatre Practitioner

Manjit Mann and Goldy Notay in *Purnjanam* by Sharmila Chauhan (Photo: Robert Workman)



GENERATION NEXT

THE BHAVAN CENTRE

It was such a pity that the talents of the vibrant and energetic young British cast were not put to a better use other than in getting them to act out their parents' and grand parents' experiences

Review by Chandrika Patel



young British cast were not put to a better use other than in getting them to act out their parents' and grand parents' experiences. The play focused on issues that are perhaps more relevant to the writer's own narrative of being an aspiring artiste in the 1970's than that of the 21st century next generation of British Asians, whose sense of selves is not necessarily located between 'back home' and Britain. Indeed young Asians are British and more often than not they are 'tourists in their so called homelands. Judging by the tweets of British Punjabis in the August 2011 riots, for many Southall is more their 'homeland' than the green fields of Punjab.

When I was researching British Asian Theatre (2004-2008), I came across emerging young Asian writers who often complained that they were expected to pen out issue-based 'Asian' stories by the funding bodies. One imagines that those few 'Asian' artistes who have 'made it' through the 'glass ceiling' might have a greater creative freedom to write less issue-based and more character-driven stories about what it is like to be British and Asian in multicultural Britain. Ironically, the caption 'Don't take me for no fool innit', tattooed on the red hennaed hands on the flier of the 'generation next' disappointingly sums up my experience of Syal's play that was more about her generation'. The theatre of the *Generation Next* needs to be fresh and relevant

Standing in a crowded lobby of the Bhavan centre on a chilly Sunday evening with other audience members, I found myself listening to the banter of the women standing behind me. "Do you know what the play's about?" asked one voice. "Dunno, but it's by Meera Syal," said the second voice. "It better be good, you know—come a long way for this", said the third voice. So what do Asian audience expect from 'Asian' theatre?

The title *Generation Next* implies something to do with young Asians perhaps and the image of the red hennaed hands placed below the title suggests it something to do with weddings. A small red light went off in my head and I wondered if this was going to yet another play that tried so hard to be 'Asian'—you may know the type—bright 'traditional' clothes, clichéd references, two dimensional characters, arranged marriages, sprinkling of a few desi words for 'authenticity', all garnished with Bhangra and Bollywood *naach gana* (dance/song). Simples! Has 'Asian' theatre become so predictable these days? Have Asian theatre makers become victims of the very narratives they (should be) trying to subvert/change?

Located in Southall, Syal's first play *Generation Next* follows two British Punjabi couples and their guests on their wedding days against the backgrounds of the Southall uprising (1979) and the London Bombings (2007). It was unusual to see a British Asian play at the Bhavan centre, known more for its 'traditional' cultural activities such as South Asian language-based *nataks* (plays) and Indian classical music/dances. Despite of the snow, the turn out on a chilly winter evening was impressive with the audience members consisting of diverse age groups mainly from 'Asian' communities

The top-down structured aspects of Syal's writing



was reflected in Gulrajni's almost predictable stage-pictures where each of the periods (1979, 2007, 2035) was conveyed with multimedia followed by social commentary between characters. Whilst the inclusion of the two-non-Asian youngsters and a few one-liners provided much needed 'light' relief, the play was mainly driven by much explored social and political issues associated with 'Asian' narrative than by characters. In this sense, the play had a recycled quality about it that could have been more imaginative and less transparent. It was such a pity that the talents of the vibrant and energetic

to their worlds and less pre-occupied with themes of identity, belonging and arranged marriages.

On my way out, I tried to look out for those three women to find out what they thought of the play but they were no where to be seen. **C** Chandrika Patel gained Ph.D in Drama (British Asian Theatre) in 2008 from the University of Exeter and works as a freelance writer, researcher and practitioner. patelchandrika@hotmail.com



DIVYA KASTURI IN FROM WHERE TO NOWHERE

'NowHere' stems from Kasturi's need to find a common ground between the Bharatanatyam and Kathak traditions.

says **Katja Vaghi**

Divya Kasturi is touring at the moment with her latest performance *NowHere*, which she also presented at the Michaelis Theatre in London last Thursday, 2nd February. *NowHere* is the classic piece about an individual journey.

To present an old theme in a new form is never easy. Nevertheless, the choreography brilliantly re-explores the *topos* in addressing powerful questions so that the classic takes on a new perspective. And maybe it is because one is so familiar with the genre that one can indulge in the artistry of how the piece has been developed. Kasturi has perfectly mastered her craft and, besides investigating the nature of identity through personal memories, imposed and chosen attitudes, adapting to and adopting new traits, she also questions the relation between the individual and tradition. In this case, it is the dance tradition in the forms of Bharatanatyam and Kathak that she goes into.



The performance, in two parts, is built on short scenes retracing Kasturi's own dance training in India and her subsequent life in the UK. The audience is greeted by an open space where typical Indian dance costumes hang from the ceiling behind a transparent protection. In what could be a section of a museum, a dancer is standing still behind one of the dresses. In the meantime a voice reels the rhythmic syllables usually associated with Bharatanatyam. The performance starts when Kasturi slides from behind the glass and starts dancing. It is then that with a quick play of lights, we are transported into the home of her first guru and, seated on a sofa together with her dancing teacher, we witness her first dance steps in her first show and her first (expensive) costume. After having mastered the style, she encounters and is seduced by another one: the Kathak style, interpreted by Urja Desai Thakore. We then see her struggle to learn and embody the style, and her effort to keep the two traditions apart. Alternating moments of Bharatanatyam dancing with Kathak sequences, she moves with a sense of guilt, rather than joy, from one to the other. From this moment onwards, Desai

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Thakore becomes Kasturi's unconscious conflict in a duet symbolising disembodiment and separation. The conflict involves more than one dimension: emotion against rationality, the young and the old Self, the individual and tradition, the past and the present, leaving Kasturi torn apart. In the last scene, the journey to Britain (where we discover that the poetry of the name 'Bharatanatyam' is



PHOTO: PRASAD R.N.

simply abbreviated to 'BN'), only enhances the feeling of estrangement under the character's skin. The new context, the new culture and the new tradition all require new elements to be mastered only adding layers to the already stratified Self. The first theatrical part is opposed to a second more abstract and shorter section, representing Kasturi's present life between India and the UK. The solo, a well-calibrated mixture of Bharatanatyam, Kathak and release techniques, reveals that Kasturi has not limited

herself to only South Asian dance traditions but that she has found yet another voice, a Western dancing voice.

NowHere stems from Kasturi's need to find a common ground between the Bharatanatyam and Kathak traditions. She takes us on a journey through personal memories and emotions accompanied by music and songs (Kasturi is also a Carnatic singer) to come to the refreshing conclusion that our personalities are re-enacted each day. Our identities are a fluid entity that we are constantly performing on and off stage changing and adapting to each experience of our life. A person is constantly in an in-between state and, in Kasturi's case, facing the threat of losing her own body inside a tradition. What has started off as an individual voluntary choice, learning to dance, becomes a depersonalising act. We are no longer writing the tradition with our bodies; it is the tradition that is inscribed in our



PHOTO: VIPUL SANGOL

body permanently. The tradition is writing us and we are losing agency over our own person. To avoid the danger of remaining silent and becoming a replicator of traditional forms, Kasturi finds the middle way where the individual can express herself through tradition. In order to achieve this, a third dance voice (this time a Western form) is introduced, the Release Technique that enables her to mediate between the South Asian forms. The integrated Self is thus able to appreciate moving in all three directions and is equipped to explore new emotive spaces.

Which is more important the dress or the individual behind the dress? For Kasturi it can only be both. (www.thebatfactory.org)

C With a background in Literature and Linguistics (MA English Studies, Zurich University) and a formation as a modern dancer (Ballet Arts, NYC), Katja Vaghi is currently interested in the relation between theories developed for language and dance.



READING BETWEEN THE LINES

by **Rita Bhimani**

In our uppercut urbanized circles here in India, when you discuss your Inca trek in Machu Picchu, or how you experienced sea life in a yellow submarine in Bora Bora, New Zealand, you could get an eyebrow-raised response. But even before we had set out for Karachi, it was an unabashed how-lucky-you-are reaction. Political posturing is something that happens between leaders; the ground realities are that people are always looking at opportunities to connect across the border.

I've experienced Pakistan before, with my husband whose cricketing travels in that country have been numerous and amazing, not to speak of the legendary hospitality of Pakistanis and the real time camaraderie for Indians. At the Literature Festival in Karachi held on 11 and 12 February, there was all this and more, as the fest brought the world in a microcosm. Naturally, writers from that country were predominantly there, but it was the graver political discussions on troubled areas in the world with crack journalists and writers that gave the KLF its meat and meaning.

To wit: Anouar Benmalek, the founder of the Algerian Committee against Torture, Anatol Lieven—former *Times* correspondent in Pakistan and in Karachi with his book *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, Stefan Weidner, specialist in Islamic studies and Robin Yassin Kassab, British Syrian writer—all of them gave a packed audience the chance to get new perspectives on the Arab Spring. Sparing nothing or no ruler.

It was this openness that permeated most of the discussions at KLF, getting as they did more than 100 writers and around 65 sessions (unfortunately too many of them parallel sessions, so that you have to choose your preferences or just take in bits and pieces to appease your conscience that you were there). And a slew of issues taking in everything from honour killings, militancy, minority rights, and sessions on Balochistan, Kashmir and Bangladesh, to discussions about teaching in mother tongues and the showcasing of soul touching films from the subcontinent.

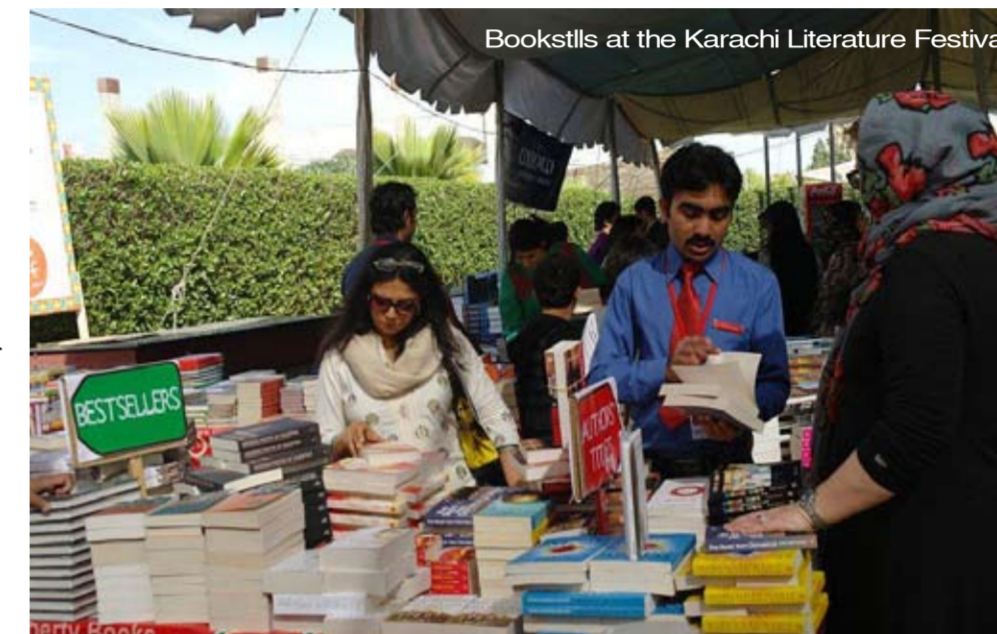
In all this, Dickens was not forgotten, celebrating as they were his 200th anniversary actively. There was the theatrical session—*Charles Dickens: The Uncommercial Traveller* by London's Arcola and Punchdrunk. And then the photography competition, held by British Council to reflect Dickens' fascination with the city of London. And so, young Pakistanis got to photograph their own cities, and the top entries were shown on large screens for us many times over—evocative, very professional pictures.

Kicking off the KLF was the keynote address by William Dalrymple. I'm normally a great Dalrymple fan, particularly for us in India, with the kind of

research he has done in his *White Moghuls* or in his *Nine Lives*. For which book he went around, troubadour-like, to various bookstores in Calcutta. I recall an intimate event when his readings were inter-

who went into Kandahar and were all massacred, save one. It was self promotion all the way, when one would have preferred a larger picture of the literary scene.

But why whinge. There were other



Bookstalls at the Karachi Literature Festival



Hanif Kureishi

equally phenomenal writers—our own Vikram Seth who is understated, modest and yet once in full flow, you could not but go along mesmerically with his metered readings, or when the crowd that spilled into the aisles and the sides got their answers to his work, whether it was about the *Golden Gate* or his latest *Rivered Earth* or *Two Lives* or his music, his librettos, poetry, *A Suitable Girl* in sequel, travels through Tibet. I'm not being prejudiced in favour of my own countryman, but he was the man of the match.

Of course Shobhaa De sizzled—sure her glam quotient is a huge presence, but there

A candid shot of author Vikram Seth taking a break between sessions



A candid shot of author Vikram Seth taking a break between sessions

persed with the music of the wandering minstrels—the *bauls*, about whom he had a chapter in the book.

At the KLF, where he should have talked in a macro manner for his opening grand speech, he fulminated instead on his latest book *The Return of a King*, on the First Afghan War held in 1839, going into gory detail about the 18,000 British troops

were the wide eyed ones who wanted every single detail about her life, more than her writing.

My favourites were the new young crop of Pakistani writers H.M. Naqvi, Mohsin Hamid, Mohammad Hanif, Ayesha Salman, who boldly writes in her debut novel *Blue Dust* about issues such as sexual repression and paedophilia. Managed to

spend some quality time with H.M. Naqvi and his lovely wife Aliya, when they recaptured their tales of their visit to Calcutta

BBC journalist Mirza Waheed, the author of *The Collaborator*, which is set in Kashmir was a draw; likewise Hanif Kureishi who gave a great concluding address saying how he was particularly impressed by people's desire in Pakistan to "speak, discuss and debate." A writer also tells you, he said what's going on "in your neighbourhood, in your country and in your politics."

The time surely belonged to the new crop of Pakistani writers and thinkers, many of them negotiating Pakistan with the rest of the world.

So if discussion and deliberation were on conflict, on open views about troubled countries, the younger target groups also got their fair share of action—with walkabout comic figures and puppet theatre and a well known Pakistani cartoonist doing a session with kids and their parents. In fact, this October, there is to be a Children's Literature Festival in Peshawar, according to Ameena Saiyid, OBE, the person who, with Asif Farukhi, has given birth to the KLF (taking huge inspiration from the Jaipur Litfest). Saiyid stressed on upping the reading habits of children in Pakistan because she felt that their children were growing up in an age of violence. "The Taliban type outlook on life is as straight as an arrow, that is, a grievance is redressed by violence." Hence, if children "were hooked on fiction, or something they found interesting to learn about, the grimness of their perspective could be diluted with life's myriad colours."

However, when US Ambassador Cameron Munter's wife, Dr Marilyn Wyatt talked about her movement to Donate a Book So a Child Can Read, there were cynics who felt book should first be replaced with bread.

As Mohammad Hanif wryly observed: "Even places that do not have running water, have lit fests."

But as I write this, the mid April London Book Fair takers will have taken guard. And I get a call from my friend Asif Noorani a leading journalist and writer from Karachi to say that we should gear up for a larger three-day KLF in February next year.

The KLF take home intellectual value has been enormous, but obviously the rapport and rapprochement far larger. **C**

Rita Bhimani is a corporate PR expert who runs her own PR consultancy, is a column writer and a professor of Media Studies, based in Calcutta.



CONFLUENCE 15

THE BEST OF THE SIX

by Ashok Ferrey

In late 2006 five people sat round my dining table drinking numerous cups of very bad coffee (made by me!) and that is essentially how the Galle Literary Festival came into being. Fast forward six years and except for festival founder Geoffrey Dobbs, none of the original members remain: but we still consider it very much our baby, even if the baby had to be given up for adoption along the way. So it was with great pride that I realized this year, for the very first time, that the festival had truly come into its own. It was the first time for instance that it ran without any major crisis: In the past we have had bombs and boycotts, to say nothing of the small matter one year of Tiger boats attacking from the sea. This was the first time too that audiences weren't mostly made up of eccentric foreigners in straw hats and aged Sri Lankan Aunties with hair-dos and dangling earrings. Now don't get me wrong—I'm a great fan of the Aunties. They are the mainstay of cultural Colombo, the leaven in the bread, the hot air in the soufflé, so to speak. But it was heartening this year to see the demographic move firmly downwards in every sense of the word.

There are many reasons for this, I think. First and foremost, it is no longer considered a treacherous act here to speak and write in English. A far cry from the very first festival when I had many anonymous late-night calls accusing me of selling out to foreign interests somehow, of betraying the local literary establishment. Young people today are desperate to speak and write English, and they rightly see this as a passport to a good future: and this year they came in droves, even if many of them sat at the back texting each other during sessions. Then of course there was the newly-built motorway. People who had been curious about the strange goings on down in Galle could now sample it for themselves, because they had the safety net of running back to Colombo in an hour if things got rough. (Sadly, this is how literature is still seen by many people here: a wild and woolly creature, unpredictable and dangerous at the best of times, usually best left alone.)

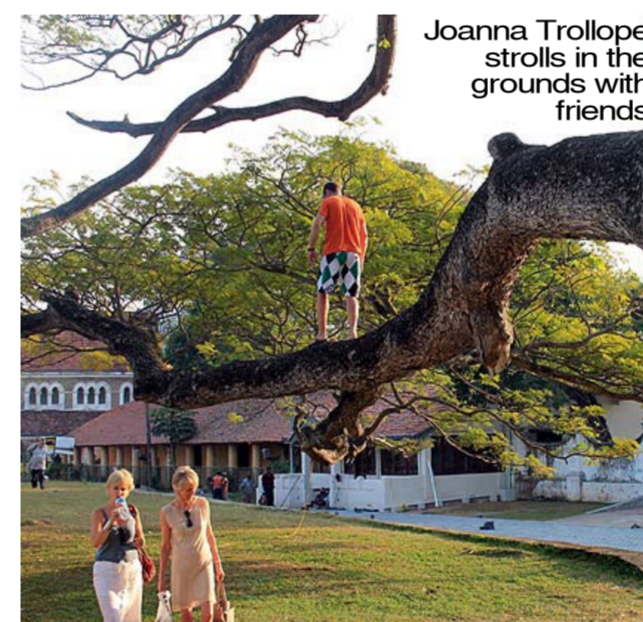
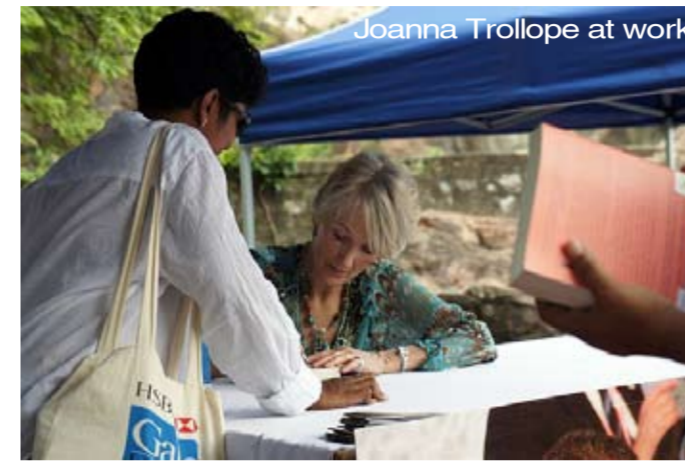
Then of course there were the Names, brighter and flashier than ever before: this year, Tom Stoppard and Richard Dawkins, DBC Pierre and the divine Joanna Trollope, Simon Sebag and Izzeldine Abuleish. Easily the most popular author of the entire four days was that High Priest of Atheism, Richard Dawkins. The hall was packed to capacity and many of us had to sit cross-legged on the floor at the feet of the great man. The atmosphere was strangely like that of a High Mass too, with Dawkins and his acolyte Lalla Ward intoning passages from his book, *The Magic of Reality*. The book was intended for younger audiences and you felt quite often that the author somewhat labored his point: you had the urge to shout *Enough, I get the message, now get on with it!* But if you did, you'd probably have been eaten alive by the mob who hung on his every word, hungry for more.

In stark contrast, Tom Stoppard was charm personified. Perhaps it helped that he had been living in Sri Lanka for the previous month, so was more attuned to the laid-back easy-going vibe of Galle. You could see him stopping on the street, talking to punters, autographing books and having his picture taken. "Do you believe in God?" I asked him. "I would be foolish," he replied, "to assume I was no more than the mere sum of my mechanical parts." (Or words to that effect; I have been unable to look at the footage yet to check the exact words.)

Then there was Joanna Trollope, supremely professional, who gave one of the best sessions. "How do you manage to characterize so beautifully?" a man in the audience asked her. "Wherever I go I watch," she replied. "Waiting in airport departure lounges, or in queues, I'm never bored—I watch people." She smiled. "Of course I have to be discreet about it."

"Here in Sri Lanka we watch too," the man replied. "But we never bother with the discretion."

Izzeldine Abuleish gave the most impassioned session of the festival, about the importance of forgiveness: so relevant to a country such as ours, emerging from a horrendous thirty-year war. The



session left many people in tears. Though it seems almost churlish to say this, it left this writer unmoved: there was too much of the scripted performance to the whole thing, not enough spontaneity. You felt he would repeat the exact same thing at his next event, at the next whistle-stop on his world tour. Perhaps as with Richard Dawkins, this is a problem that does not afflict mere mortals like you and me, only superstars. They are so much in demand, their lives so busy, that the only way they can cope is to switch to auto-pilot whenever they are in the public eye.

Then there was John Boyne talking about his immensely popular book *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*, and Simon Sebag who gave a dramatic and lucid account of that most ancient of cities, Jerusalem; and DBC Pierre the wild child of English letters, whose wildness fitted in quite nicely I thought with the wildness of Galle. "I want to make a film," he said to me, "about the murderous tuk-tuks of Galle."

Nayantara Sahgal, niece of Jawaharlal Nehru, was moderated by Eleanor Wachtel for CBC Radio. "My Uncle had many female friends," said Nayantara. "Especially Edwina Mountbatten." She paused and looked at Eleanor. The whole audience waited with bated breath for the next question. But the rider failed to make the horse jump. "I felt I just couldn't ask," Eleanor later said rather ruefully. This was Nayantara's last ever festival, and she is perhaps the last living primary source. So I guess now we'll never know!

Of course a literary festival isn't a literary festival without music, and this year we had the wonderful Jason Kouchak with his virtuoso piano-playing and his magnetic voice at the Sun House. Also Sri Lanka's finest pianist, Eshantha Peiris, with his concert in Galle's splendid Baroque church. Then there was the electric violinist who played all day at the Lit Fest Café (at least the violin was electric; the violinist wasn't bad either).

Every year there is criticism that not enough is made of Sri Lankan writers and Sri Lankan writing. The festival curator Shyam Selvadurai had obviously given great thought to this, and this year's festival opened with the launch of three new books by Sri Lankan authors: Roshi Fernando, Romesh Gunsekera, and the third? Oh, I forget who the third was. Then there was the festival outreach programme that took festival authors up to Jaffna, an extremely important segment of the festival each year.

All in all, a job tremendously well done by Shyam and his festival manager Amrita Peiris: as a hardened veteran of all six festivals I can honestly say, with calloused hand on hardened heart: This was easily the best of the six! **C**

Ashok Ferrey's new book, *Love In The Tsunami* is out now through Penguin India

MUMBAI EXPRESSIONS

ANJU MAKHIJA

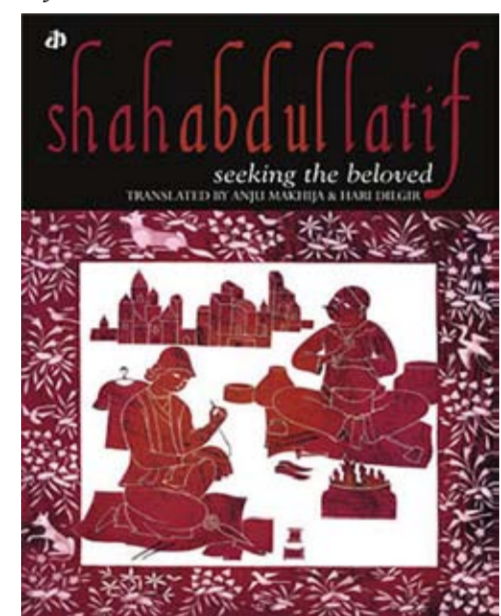


Let me begin by sharing some good news with my readers. Sahitya Akademi's Translation Prizes for this year have just been announced. They are given in 22 languages and I have won the prize in the English category for *Shah Abdul Latif: Seeking the Beloved*. It is indeed a joyful moment only dampened by the fact that my co-translator, Hari Dilgir, is no more. It was his in-depth knowledge of old Sindh, with its sprinkling of Arabic and Persian, that allowed us to successfully do the translation. While Shah Latif, the 16th century poet and mystic has been extensively translated in Germany, Pakistan and other countries, this book is the first Indian translation of *Shah Jo Risalo*, a compilation of his work. The prize carries an amount of Rs. 50,000/- and a copper plaque which will be presented to the translators at a special function to be held in August 2012. Some of the winners in the other languages include *Gift Packet* translated by S. Shesapattnam (Hindi) and *Bharti Nikky Kabani* by Gurbax Singh Frank (Punjabi).

Much has been written about the Jaipur Literary Festival (JLF) so it was a pleasure to hear Namita Gokhale, co-director of the ever-expanding JLF, on 'Why are there so many literary festivals these days?' This question was put to Gokhale when she spoke on the inaugural day of Mumbai's *Kala Ghoda Arts Festival*. Admitting it's phenomenal growth even 'scars her', she felt that such events satisfy a need in people to be part of a literary community; moreover with varied viewpoints presented, communication takes place at different levels as 'anxieties and emotions came in the forefront.' The media generally focuses mainly on the 'hype' and, this year too the Salman Rushdie controversy got out of hand. As Gokhale aptly put it, it was a 'comedy of terrors' in Jaipur and values of our literary culture were at loggerheads with the politics of religion. Some fanatical

groups even sought criminal cases against the four authors who read from Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as well as the organizers of the festival. Also some Muslim groups in Rajasthan refused to allow Rushdie's video interview on the last day of the JLF. Naturally, many felt that no community, caste, or group can threaten others and, if they do so, they should lose their democratic right to be heard. Others suggested the *Satanic Verses* and Rushdie's other novels be freely available in Urdu so that readers can decide for themselves if these books are blasphemous.

JLF had its share of celebrities with



Oprah Winfrey, Tom Stoppard and Fatima Bhutto. The festival focused on a range of topics, including *Bhakti* and *Sufi* traditions, Gandhi and Anna Hazare, censorship and violence. In fact, a number of sessions were about faith, religion and God. When moderator Sanjoy K Roy, took a poll at the end, it was reported that a surprising number in the audience were against the idea of God! From Gokhale's talk, it became apparent that she is very passionate about preserving the many Indian languages and dialects. Saving our oral literature will also

be on the festival's future agenda. Theatre was in the limelight this year, with Tom Stoppard commenting: 'I do enjoy writing plays and watching plays and thinking about the possibilities they can have. But I don't think of theatre as a text. I think of it as an event.'

The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival (KGAF) attracted a huge audience this year with its street stalls, music, art and dance events. Food was in focus...culture and cuisines are becoming strange bedfellows! Chefs like Milind Sovan (who won the Asian chef of the year prize) and Prakash Thadani embarked on food-art journeys



blending oriental delights with colorful presentations. I caught Sovan's 'act', which he says has been performed and showcased in 10 countries; he has also been the chef for two Indian prime ministers. It had many elements of theatre and, above all, a rapt audience. Thadani too is a known face in Mumbai's music and cultural scene and has started *Cool Chef Café* where book readings, art happenings and the like are presented regularly. In a bustling city like Mumbai, the competition is fierce, so not only Bollywood personalities, but even

chefs master the art of gaining attention!

Poets, who are usually reclusive, also participate quite actively in the literary section with events such as 'poetry for peace' which took place at the historic *David Sassoon Library* garden. A unique feature of KGAF is that it pays special attention to children's literature, dance and film. *Stanley Ka dabba* was featured as well as regional films.

One of the highlights of the season was the publication of *Trying To Say Goodbye*, a long anticipated collection of poems by Adil Jussawalla (*Almost Island Books*). For several decades, he has helped keep the poetry scene alive in Mumbai with his articles, reviews and readings. Over the years, Jussawalla has also published books for XAL—PRAXIS Foundation. As in other countries, in India too, it's the small press that publishes 'inventive' literature. Jussawalla's work has always been marked by originality. I recall being introduced to his poetry via *Missing Person*, and there was this compulsion to read and re-read the poems. Great lessons there for any budding poet. The new book launch took place at *Kitaab Khanna*, which is becoming a popular venue. Tackling the theme of shelters, Jussawalla read from the poem, *House: See my still-polished staircase rising! To ends that can never be met! Doorways that draw a blank...* the poet informed us that the original notes of this poem were written in London where he went to study architecture.

This collection also has a series of poems on 'Londoners'...poems that give poetic shape to people he came across. In *Baglady Anna*, the poet writes: *She's come to believe all roads from her lead into greater homelessness...* In Hongkong Lee, we hear another voice: *Someone, pass me my gloves! so I can uppercut the boss! for every undercut he throws me! Me Lee, kitchen worker, forced to set up house! on the bad side of the Thames, /river that smells of slaves. Mother's Ninety-fourth Birthday* is a poem that touched me personally: *You keep to your bed. / The doctors say you won't walk again. / We come in pairs mostly /phantom wings/ trying to make you fly.* Some poems in the book bring the phrase 'poetic genius' to mind. I say this not to flatter the poet, but to appreciate the poetry. I suspect the two may have a life of their own. **C**

Anju Makhija is a poet, playwright and translator based in Mumbai. She has recently co-edited an anthology of women's poetry, *We Speak in Changing Languages*. Makhija has been on the English Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi. New email: anjumakhija17@gmail.com

AKADEMI'S LOOKING FOR THE INVISIBLE

THE 'ABSTRACT' IN SOUTH ASIAN ARTS

Suparna Banerjee

Akademī's one-day led symposium to search for the invisible in the realm of South Asian arts practices was a unique experience for those who attended it at the Place's Robin Howard Dance Theatre in London on February 25, 2012. Established three decades ago, *Akademī* plays its unique role as an umbrella organisation to converge practices, arts and scholastic ventures in unravelling varied shades of topical issues in the domain of South Asian (SA) culture in this age of global flow. Over the last decade, it established a tradition of organising inventive symposiums to address the challenges and questions within the scope of SA arts, a few notable events include *South Asian Aesthetics—Unwrapped* (Royal Opera House) in 2004, *No Man's Land—Exploring South Asianness* (ICA) in 2005, and *Frame by Frame—A Symposium on the Dance of Indian Cinema and its Transition into Bollywood Dancing* (Royal Opera House) in 2009. As a meaningful event, this symposium—*Looking for the Invisible: The 'Abstract' in South Asian Arts*—drew a large crowd of mindful scholars, practitioners, artists, researchers, dancers and dance companies of the SA diaspora from in and around London, Europe and also India with an objective to reflect on the topic of 'abstractness'. The title of the symposium being ambiguous was duly opened for contestations through panel discussions and multi-media demonstrations.

The program was formally inaugurated by Mr. Richard Blurton, trustee of the *Akademī*. Following his brief exposition, Ms. Sangita Bahadur, the Director of the Nehru Centre introduced the concept of *nirguna*, which in Sanskrit means 'divine without attributes' and connotes all inclusiveness. Her lecture was quite enlightening in unpacking the philosophical terminologies with lucidity. Christopher Bannerman, Professor and Head of Dance at the University of Middlessex, was engaged with the material and medium of SA arts, especially *nritta*, the technique of displaying forms without having any element of text. He discussed its abstract nature and explained how this technique is contrasted with textuality that is conveyed through variegated gestures in narrative dances in all SA dance forms. To him, abstractness appeared as a base to explore newness in SA dances—an instrument to get involved with artistic medium and philosophical questions.

A lively discussion centred around the presentation by Sadanand Menon, an art editor, photographer, curator, and advocate of cultural journalism, which delighted the audience. His illustrated keynote talk contained topics ranging from traditional and classical arts, body-space equation,

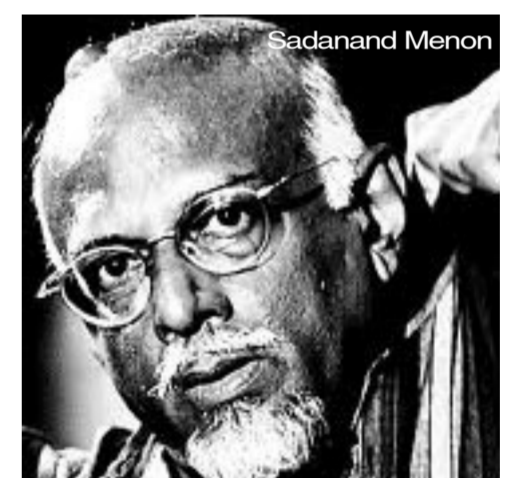
centrifugal and centripetal forces to execute movements in abstract dance, and abstractness in Indian iconography of *Nataraja*, the Lord of Dance in Hindu mythology. A glimpse of short performing sequences by Anusha Subramanyam, the artistic director of *Beeja*—a London based dance company were demonstrated to show various concepts of rhythm, time, space and meanings from the *Nataraja* icon. Menon subsequently discussed briefly how each of these elements—*damaru*, *agni apasmara purusha* etc. could be used as abstract concepts. He drew on his extensive experience with Chandralekha, the



Indian contemporary female dancer with whom he has worked and travelled widely as a light designer. He discussed Chandralekha's *Sbarina*, which had received wide applause in India as well as abroad. His engagement in explaining how Chandralekha questioned the body's geometry through this work was well-received. Audiences were seen engrossed in watching Chandralekha's monologue on the screen and were provoked to search her query—'where my body began?' And soon after this, Anita Ratnam, the Founder-Director of *Arangham Dance Company* from Chennai, emerged on the podium to respond to this question: 'I know, my body began in my mother's womb'. Much known as a narrator, story-teller, dancer, theatre artist and the creator of the Indian dance portal www.narthaki.com, her works exemplify a juncture between theory and practice. Her questions were equally thought-provoking, especially the one that asked, 'can you abstract *abhinaya*' (mimetic art)? And at the end, she questioned this search for the invisible and bounced the following query back to the audience: 'I live and perform in India, so why do you ask this question?'

Alkananda Samartha, an alumnus of RADA and the first Indian actress to play a lead role at the National Theatre, London, is acclaimed for her *Kantti and the Human voice* and *Khayal Gatha*. Her short presentation drawing on her experience in performing theatrical arts was equally enchanting! While discussing abstractness in narratives, she asserted that it depends on how we allow ourselves to see and also be seen and heard. Excerpts of these above-mentioned works were screened in the theatre.

A panel discussion after each session chaired by Professor Bannerman provided



an opportunity for audiences to hear these artists, writers and performers explain their subjective expressions on the theory of abstractness. These discussions helped to extort various meanings of this term 'abstract' such as 'not figurative', 'reductive', 'essentialist', 'pure', 'real' and 'transcendental'. The panel ended up with an expression of hope for addressing a few pertinent future questions: is abstraction real? Is there any element of authenticity in the art of abstraction? Overall, it attempted to update our thinking on this issue and thus remained a great intellectual stimulation for all of us!

Sonia Sabri, the artistic director of *Sonia Sabri Company* presented a short piece using rhythmic syllables to the abstractness in Kathak dance. *Sonia Sabri Company* has developed its own innovative style, 'Urban Kathak', to visualize urban representations through various

elemental techniques, blending them with movement vocabulary across cultures. Her *Kathakbox* has received wide audience response. Shobana Jeyasingh, the artistic director of the *Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company*, presented a glimpse of her site-specific choreography, *Counterpoint* which was commissioned by Somerset House and English National Ballet as part of Big Dance in 2010. Although it was an abstract performance situating bodies in atypical performance spaces amalgamating it with several dance genres, she agreed that her lineage as a Bharatanatyam dancer always promulgates her to narrate story through abstract physicality.

Tim Supple's video clips from his vibrant and colourful *Midsummer Night's Dream* charmed the audience. The play has a multi-lingual text and estranges itself from the work of popular bard, Shakespeare and creates its own identity through this multi-layered textual fabric. It was intriguing to hear him recounting his experience in India. Currently a co-director of Dash Arts and a director known for his adaptations throughout the UK and across borders, Tim mesmerised audiences by sharing his idea on the art of narrating stories. After each session, dialogue between artist and audience provided ample scope to satisfy their queries. Gautam Malkani, a journalist from the *Financial Times* elaborated his views on abstract writings. Much known today for his novel, *Londonstani*, which portrays the lives of second and third generation South Asian immigrants, he amused the audience by reading passages from his writings. His reading style was dramatic and impressive. Later, audiences were engaged in conversing with Malkani about several playwrights, texts and the theme of abstractness.

A video clip from Sheba Chhachhi's *Neelkanth (Bluetheatre): poison/nectar* received wide appreciation especially on account of her expression of ecological consciousness which relocates the mythological figure of *Neelakantha* in a contemporary Indian city. An installation artist of visual arts from New Delhi, she explores myth and iconography from a contemporary perspective to create new works. Her presentation questioned if the archetypal mythological imagery of *Neelakantha*, can transform poison into nectar. Her eco-philosophical piece *Water-Diviner* also heightened the theme of abstractness. The contents and debates raised were summed up in a comprehensive manner by Chitra Sundaram, reputed Bharatanatyam danseuse, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a member of the South Asian Dance Faculty of the Imperial Society for Teachers of Dance and a trustee of Westminster Arts.

Continued from page 19: **Looking For The Invisible**

Following the symposium, the curious audiences attended a performance of Aakash Odedra's *Rising* which consisted of a set of four solos. *Rising* included choreographies by Russell Maliphant, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Akram Khan and a self-choreographed piece that used Kathak dance idioms. As a canvas, it explored different processes and aesthetics to create a new contemporary abstract language. In the piece created by Khan, *In the Shadow of the Man*, the dancer body was seen delineating complex floor designs that contained no narrative. Russell Maliphant's *Cut* abounded in gyrations, twists and turns blended with Tai Chi technique. Sidi Larbi



Cherkaoui's *Constellation* was abstracted through new movement vocabulary. These performances were really a visual treat to the audiences' eyes and a grand finale to attend this theme of 'abstract'.

Akademi's Director Mira Kaushik was present throughout this afternoon. The symposium brought many other distinguished art practitioners, theorists, emerging artists and performers from India and different parts of Europe. In brief, this symposium offered a good opportunity to the attendees to witness an array of multi-disciplinary presentations. The broad scope and its multiple artistic works coverage intrigued many. The rich mix of academic arguments, showcase of professional works through multi-media resources and live dance performances brought a comprehensive engagement to its thematic core. The effective combination for the quest for abstract in reading of artists' works as texts has invariably triggered the following query in audiences' minds: should I call you *saguna* (with form) or *nirguna* (without form)/*saguna* and *nirguna* are One (as you)' (Sant Tukaram). This endeavour of *Akademi* undoubtedly commands appreciation as an event of this kind is very motivating for all inquiring researchers, scholars, creators, thinkers, artists and the discerned audiences. **C**

Suparna Banerjee is trained in Bharatanatyam and Indian Classical music. Her research interests include South Asian dance, transnationalism and dance pedagogy.



20 CONFLUENCE

SMOKERS' CORNER

Jameela Siddiqi

Why do shop assistants always give me that disdainful look when I try to buy cigarettes? I am, alas—and look—well over 18 years old.

There's a tendency to grudgingly hand over a small packet of 10 when I've clearly asked for 40. And then to look doubly disapproving when I try to point out the mistake.

Yes, yes, I know it is illegal to smoke (indoors) but just be thankful I'm willing to part with some hard earned cash to buy these death sticks. Also, handing these over to me for real money, helps keep you in a job, so kindly take that superior, self-righteous look off your face. And, while you're at it, also note that by tempting an early death I won't be placing too great a burden on our defunct pension system. Moreover, what right have you to decide that I need to live to be very, very old—so old in fact that my income plummets to zero whilst my heating bills shoot up by quite a few zeros?

In any case, I feel obliged to explain that the reason I'm buying so many cigarettes is because I will be going out tonight. And

Although Nazi Germany was the first modern state to ban indoor smoking (because Adolf could not stand the stuff, and neither did he allow it in those final claustrophobic days in the famous bunker), it's still the very best thing that could've happened to Britain and, particularly, to London. Not only do our locked-window open-plan offices become ever more sanitised (despite the stench of other people's smelly lunches from the filthy communal kitchen which replaced the good old works canteen), surely you can't have failed to notice how very beautiful and safe central London becomes on those long summer nights when everybody but everybody is out in the streets whilst the interiors of pubs, bars and cafes are desolate?

These diehard smokers thronging the pavements are actually doing the job the police should be doing. By being out and about they are the ones who are making it so much easier for a woman alone to walk late at night.

Let them always remain outside, I say, drink in one hand and fag in the other, policing our streets and creating a jolly



there will be lots of other people there. And although nearly all of those people will claim to have "given up", it will eventually transpire that they've really only given up *buying* cigarettes.

The minute they see me stepping out for you-know-what, they're going to gaze at me like forlorn puppies and ask to "cadge a fag," accompanied by the words, "I've given up, you know?" Quickly followed by what they think amounts to an honourable excuse: "Just seeing you, makes me want to..."

So now I'm a doubly hardened criminal: a) for still smoking and, b) for laying temptation in the path of those who have given up *buying* cigarettes.

No matter what I say or write, I must reassure you that I just love, love, love the Government ban on smoking indoors. Long may it continue! (But, even before the ban, the No Smoking rule was strictly applied in all offices and public buildings I had been in since about 1989.) And, I'm also informed that the No Smoking rule, in theory, also applied on Death Row where a prisoner about to be executed was denied his last wish for a last cigarette on the grounds that it was very bad for his health.

At a time when inequality caused by income disparity is growing, the smoking ban has facilitated a great levelling out: top executive director and office cleaner alike have to share the same confined space, under an awning in the pouring rain, in order to do their habit. And this has greatly facilitated my chance meetings with the top guys and girls—whom I would certainly never have met otherwise—leading to at least a couple of lucrative freelance assignments.

atmosphere as a by-product. (And I haven't even mentioned all those lovely young men and women who throng the pavements of Edgware Road as they drag on their *shishas*). And, remember, they've all splashed their own money on buying cigarettes: they haven't asked for cigarette money as "expenses" because they're performing a civic duty in keeping our streets lively and populated. Well, one or two of them have spent their own money: the rest will be scrounging fags off those who happen to still go on buying them.

Incidentally, this is also a good time to also point out that some people have taken the smoking ban far too seriously—so seriously in fact that nobody now carries a matchbox. In a recent emergency, not a single person had a matchbox in their pocket or purse. The reason? "Sorry, I don't smoke."

What's that got to do with carrying matches? All good boy scouts and girl-guides were once taught that a matchbox is one of ten essential items that must always be carried on, or about, their person. Other essentials included such exciting objects as a compass, a length of string, a band-aid called "Elastoplast" and, of course, a knife. But that last item could get you into big big trouble nowadays. Bigger than being caught with a box of matches and certainly much bigger than actually owning your pack of 20! **C** Jameela Siddiqi, writer, broadcaster and lecturer in Indian classical music, is an alumnus of the London School of Economics.



LEADING LADIES

by Sudha Menon with an Introduction by Ela Bhatt

Fortytwo Bookz Galaxy, Santacruz (E) Mumbai, 2011. Rupees 795, US\$ 24; Hardback ISBN 978-81-908411-8-4

Leading Ladies celebrates fifteen of India's inspiring women who deserve to be role models not only for women alone but for men as well.

Reviewed by Reginald Massey

This is a well produced volume. The cover is black with superimposed gold lettering and decorated with a bright red *bindi*, the compelling beauty mark of Indian women, irrespective of caste distinctions and socio-economic barriers. It is a pleasure to read this book. In my opinion Indian women are amongst the most beautiful in the world. Hence it is a great pity that there is not a single picture of any of the ladies apart from the author's which adorns the back flap. However, they are all clearly motivated by an immense feminine force (*shakti*) which dwarfs and neuters the meagre and pathetic attempts of male domination. Men are basically weak but in order to assert their hegemony they, throughout the ages, have tried to prove their self-labelled 'superiority'. Therefore in all male-manipulated civilizations women have been treated as second class beings, inferior to men. They have been misused as necessary wombs to produce sons, not daughters. In short, women have universally had a raw deal.

Since this book is about Indian women let us examine the female gender in the Indian context. In the Brahminical social order there was the strict caste system, the subordination of women and the obnoxious practise of Untouchability. (Consult the *Smriti* of Manu the law-giver). The wife regarded her husband as her *pati-dev* (husband-god) and she was the *griha-lakshmi* (the one who brought wealth to her husband's family). This is because she came with a stipulated dowry. If beautiful and fair-complexioned her dowry was low; but if she were dark complexioned the dowry was high. The system was much concerned with colour discrimination and persists even today in secular, democratic and 'modern' India. (Peruse the marriage advertisements in India and even in the United Kingdom).

However, because of women's education and uplift (initiated long ago by dedicated Christian missionaries who are now being much maligned) there are in India today some shining examples of outstanding women in various fields. Most of the women in this book, for instance, were educated in girls' convent schools or institutions modelled on convents.

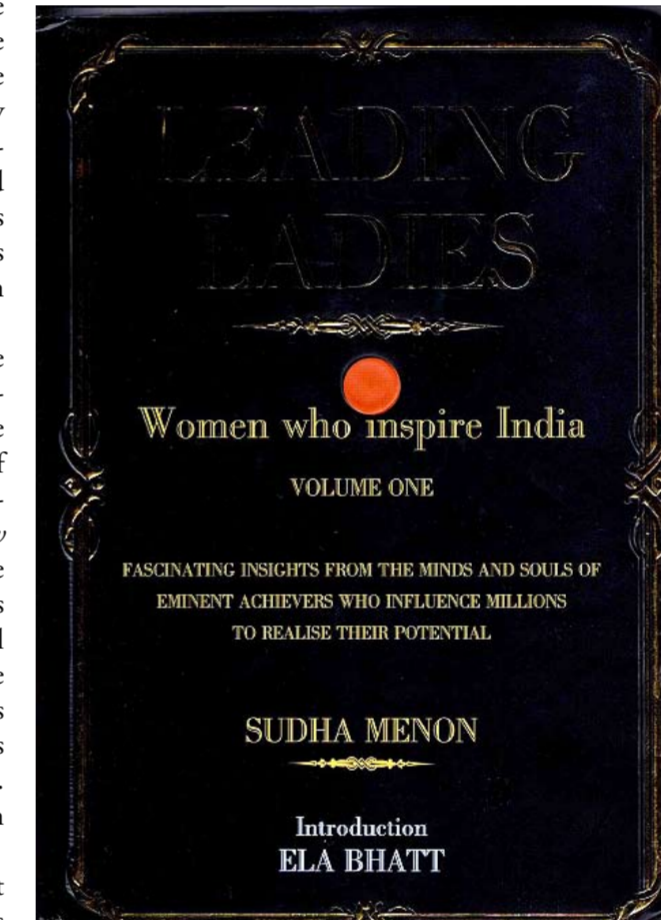
Leading Ladies celebrates fifteen of India's inspiring women who deserve to be role models not only for women alone but for men as well.

Sudha Menon has done the selection and there is a wise Introduction by Ela Bhatt, founder of Sewa (Self Employed Women's Association) which is a mega organisation of over 1.25 million dedicated Indian women.

I happen to know one of the leading ladies, Mallika Sarabhai, daughter of Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme. Her mother is the marvellous Mrinalini. Mrinalini is the sister of Lakshmi Sehgal who led the Azad Hind 'Rani of Jhansi' regiment of Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. Mallika and Mrinalini are outstanding dancers, choreographers and women's activists. It was not easy for the Sarabhais (based in Ahmedabad) to take on the likes of the hard-hitting Narendra Modi, the manipulative *gauleiter* of Gujarat. However, the Sarabhais and their ilk (such as the heroic Harsh Mander) are not in the least cowed or frightened. Such is their amazing *shakti*. 'My freedom was not nego-

table, not even for love,' is a memorable Mallika quote. *Vah! Vah!!*

The fourteen others who are profiled are: Amrita Patel who fought her way up the ladder to become chairperson of the National Dairy Development Board. She says, 'Educated women from the cities are letting their village sisters down by not participating in their development.' Later she admits with candour, 'It is a myth that caste has been drowned in the cooperative milk collection centres of



rural India... We might allow a lower caste farmer to pool his milk with the rest of the village and get an income, but the truth is he will never be elected chairman, even if he is educated.'

Anu Aga is on the board of Thermax, the leading Indian energy and environment management company. She states, 'If you are sure of yourself, you don't need quotas.' Kalpana Moraria, a high flying investment and management specialist, heads JP Morgan India. She says, 'Age is just a record. It is all in the mind, even now, I am in my late twenties.' Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw who heads Biocon, one of India's fastest growing pharmaceutical and biotech companies, is among the richest women in the country. 'I keep telling myself,' she says, 'that as a nation we are doomed if we don't innovate.' The nation would do well to listen to her. Lila Poonawalla is on the board of several companies and her Lila Poonawalla Foundation supports women students to take post graduate degrees in India and abroad. Her motto is: 'Don't take rejection, persist, but if you fail, don't be demoralised.' Mallika Srinivasan is vice chairman of Tractors and Farm Equipment, one of the three largest tractor manufacturers in the world. 'Success at work is too limited a parameter of a woman's real value. She has the power to change the destiny of an entire family,' is her sobering thought. All success-

ful women please take note. Chemical engineer Meher Pudumjee is the current chairperson of Thermax having succeeded Anu Aga in 2004. She declares, 'Very often in India, people are in awe of status, which is something I dislike.' Naina Lal Kidwai, group head of HSBC India, offers a fresh perspective worth considering: 'Often we women see glass ceilings even where they don't exist.'

Priya Paul will not know me but years ago I had a connection with her late father Surrendra Paul through his elder brother Swraj Paul, now Lord Paul. Surrendra Paul had married my sister's fellow student from Saint Bede's College, Simla. He had a great sense of humour and an unforgettable hearty laugh that went with it. Priya now heads Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels and is an art collector. Surrendra Paul's love of life has been inherited by his daughter. She says, 'I enjoy what I do. I'm not doing it for the money anymore. Now it's about creating something exciting and innovative and I am trying to do it while having fun.'

P.T. Usha, who made her name as a sprinter and now heads the Usha School of Athletics, learnt to run barefoot on the beaches of Kerala. She proudly says that she never possessed a pair of track pants or shoes and had no idea what a crouch start was. She says, 'Talent alone is not enough. It has to be backed by the hunger to win and survive any odds.' Shaheen Mistri is the CEO of 'Teach for India', a nationwide movement to create a community of leaders who will eliminate inequity in Indian education. What gave her the impetus for her crusade? This was her response: 'I wanted to figure out how I could have so much while so many other people in this country had so little.' Shika Sharma is the CEO of Axis Bank and the managing Director of ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company. Her parrot thought is, 'Men and women are different, no question about it. They are programmed differently.'

Since I write on Indian classical music I'm glad that a woman musician-composer features in this book. Shubha Mudgal needs no introduction to devotees of music. I'm glad that she has strong views about Intellectual Property Rights: 'Indian musicians, particularly those involved with traditional music, are often unaware of issues pertaining to IPR.' When, I ask myself, will Indian musicians across the board sink their differences, bury their egos and band together in a strong Musicians' Union? Until that happens all musicians will continue to be exploited.

Vinita Bali, is CEO and MD of Britannia Industries, one of India's leading food corporations. It was Nusli Wadia, grandson of Pakistan's creator Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who asked her to rescue his failing flagship company. She did that and more. Britannia now flourishes. She says that she is much inspired by her maid who 'slogs through the day to send her two children to an English medium school'. Her final declaration is: 'We need to create equality of opportunity and meritocracy.'

This first volume is an important document. I await the second volume. **C** Reginald Massey's *India: Definitions and Clarifications* (Hansib, London) studies caste and the position of women in both the Hindu and Muslim communities.

INDIA INSIDE: THE EMERGING INNOVATION CHALLENGE TO THE WEST

by Nirmalya Kumar and Phanish Puranam

Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, USA. 2012. ISBN 978-1-4221-5875-3

What these London based Indian academics have to say is amazing and awesome. India has much to offer the west and the world at large. But it must at first set its own house in order. The country must purge itself of rampant corruption in every sphere of its national life

Reginald Massey

Before I comment on what Professors Kumar and Puranam of the London Business School (and co-directors of the Aditya Birla India Centre) have set down, I'd like to make my position clear. In other words I'll set out my stall, my *dukaan*. Being cynical, particularly of young brilliants, I'm suspicious of big talk and upbeat projections. What the dicks are they selling? is the first thought that flashes across my old-fashioned mind. Having witnessed the fall of great empires such as the British, the Russian and now the American, I suppose I can be forgiven for being somewhat unforgiving and choleric. As a passionate young Nehruvian I was shattered to see the great dream of a socialist India, then leading the Non Aligned Movement, disintegrate in corruption and what came to be known as the Licence Raj. Will the New India wedded to the principles of capitalism do any better? *Ims* come and go but the slumdog poverty of the Indian people persists.

Hence when the 250 million UMIs (Upwardly Mobile Indians) chant songs of 'Incredible India!' and 'India Rising!' I simply cannot drag myself to join the happy throng. It is no secret that over 750 million Indians live in dire and humiliating poverty and for whom even clean drinking water is a luxury. And so when smug and disgustingly self-satisfied folk rant on about India as a Great Power it, quite frankly, makes me puke. I know many of these UMIs; some of them quite pleasant people. They earn fabulous salaries, air conditioned flats are provided for them, they have domestic servants, chauffeurs drive them about, they fly from city to city, and even their club fees and massage sessions are funded by their corporate masters. They are on to a very good thing. Good luck to them and it isn't surprising that they fervently believe that India is thriving. Because *they* are thriving.

How can a minority (a quarter of a country's population) costume itself in the mantle of 'greatness' when three-quarters of the population are malnourished, have no education worth the name, no health services, no decent housing and, above all, no human dignity? Where, I ask myself, is the spirit and the teaching of Gandhi? He, the greatest Indian since Gautam Buddha, has been assigned to history and university courses in 'Gandhian Studies'. But today there are no takers for PhDs in 'Gandhian Studies'.

Nevertheless, this book addresses the 250 million UMIs, a sizable chunk of humanity, and their counterparts, their natural partners in the capitalist west. This book, however, has no meaning for the millions of unemployed working class Brits and Europeans or the laid off blue-collar workers and professionals in the States. It does not talk about

the hunger of Pakistan, Bangladesh or even the tragedy of Afghanistan. Hence I will now comment on what the authors have to say about Emergent India.

There is no doubting the fact that India, and even China, Russia and Brazil, are emerging and challenging the 400 year old economic, cultural, political and military supremacy of the west. At my public school in India I was taught that China was a 'nation of starving coolies doped on

punch, eloquent argument and thrust

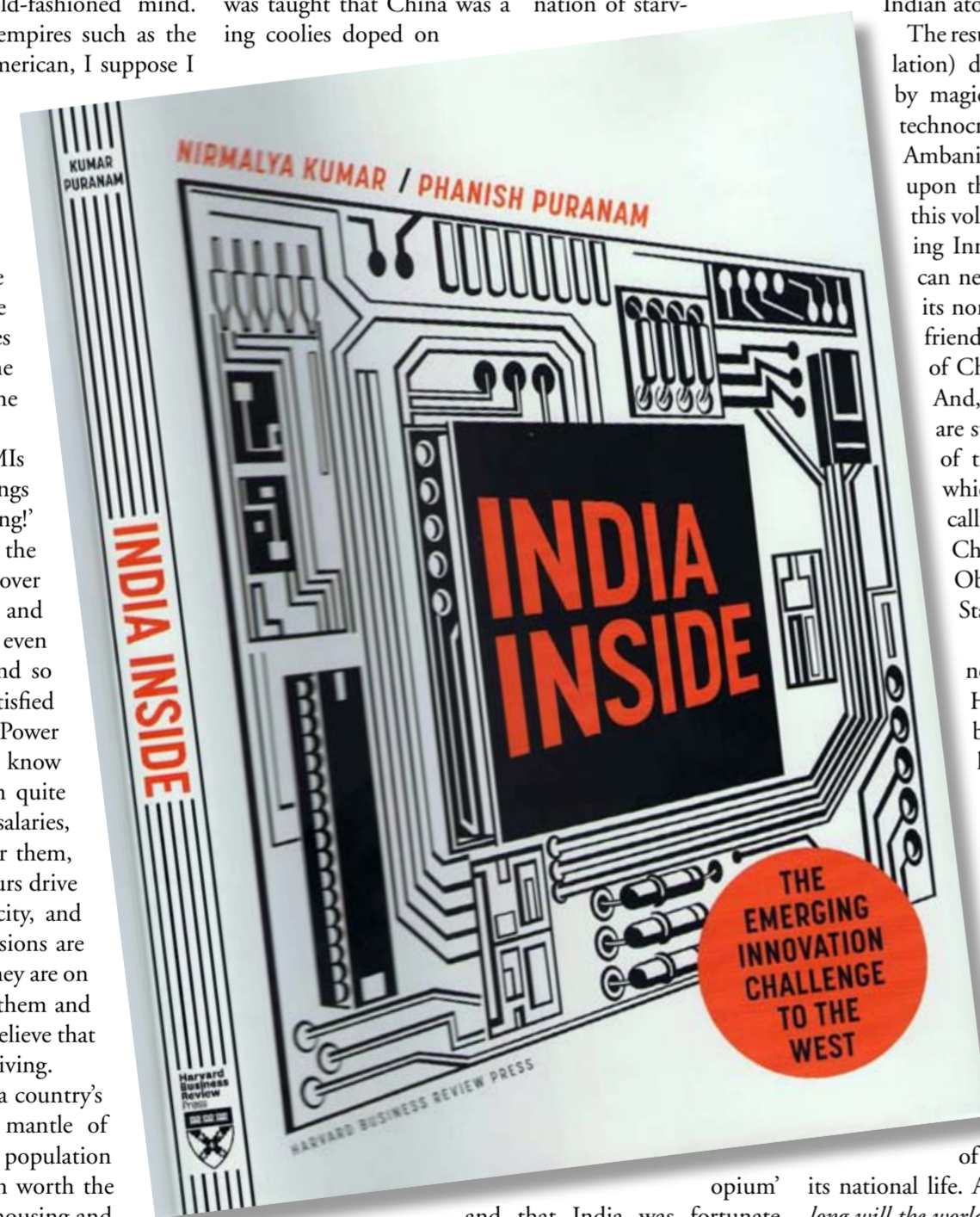
In fact, another Tamil Brahmin, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, went further when analysing the India psyche. He said that every educated Indian was, in truth, culturally an Anglo-Indian. It was, after all, British education that produced the likes of Nehru, the creator of the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology, the high dams and the Indian atomic energy programmes.

The resurgence of India (or a quarter of its population) did not suddenly emerge miraculously by magic from a vacuum. Today's high flying technocrats and entrepreneurs (Ratan Tata, the Ambanis, Asif Premji *et al*) have clambered up upon the shoulders of giants. The authors of this volume have used the subtitle 'The Emerging Innovation Challenge to the West'. India can never challenge the West nor even China its northern Super Power and not particularly friendly neighbour. India got a bitter taste of China's immense strike capacity in 1962. And, incidentally, the India-China borders are still in dispute. China claims huge tracts of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh which, it asserts, historically and geographically belong to the Tibetan region of south China. Moreover, India and President Obama know all too well that the United States is today in hock to China.

India has to face the challenge of the new Empire of China as does the west. Hence India must not challenge the west but join forces with the west to stem the hegemony of China; or, to use a nasty bygone dirty term, the *Yellow Peril*. In the 21st century collaboration must be the mantra. And there is no reason why India and China should not arrive at an accommodation and innovate for the common good.

What these London based Indian academics have to say is amazing and awesome. India has much to offer the west and the world at large. But it must at first set its own house in order. The country must purge itself of rampant corruption in every sphere of its national life. Also, the question must be asked: *How long will the worldwide capitalist system last?* It is, after all, based on greed, not need, and that is why the entire planet is in an absolute mess today. However, this extended and well researched study should be made required reading in business schools the world over. It must also be read by the Presidents and CEOs of the multinational corporations. They might learn a thing or two. **C**

Reginald Massey's latest book is *India: Definitions and Clarifications* (Hansib, London). He has been Writer-in-Residence at the UBS think tank at Wolfsberg Chateau, Switzerland.



DEV ANAND –THE ETERNAL ROMANTIC

Dharam Dev Anand, actor, producer and film-maker, born 26 September 1923, India; died 3 December 2011, London

By Lalit Mohan Joshi

From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, Dev Anand was a singular phenomenon of popular Indian Cinema. I had met him first nearly 20 years back as a BBC broadcast journalist for recording my feature series on the history of Indian Cinema. He was 68 at that time. I was stunned by his drawing power, his interest in people, alertness and presence of mind. While recording an interview, I could never win an argument with him. Drawn by his energy, I became a Dev Anand addict and during my annual India trips he always welcomed my visits to his Pali Hill Studios in Bandra.

Among Indian Cinema's three big stars of the Golden Era (1950s and 1960s), Dev Anand is the only one to have written an autobiography ('Romancing with Life'). This Penguin Viking publication (2007) is a detailed engaging account of his times that recreates the changes that swept the Indian film industry after independence. True to the title, 'Romancing with Life', it candidly reconstructs the romantic liaisons of Dev Anand specially the major one with the great star of the 1940s and 50s, Suraiya.

Born in Gurdaspur in undivided India in 1923, Dev Anand's father, Pishorimal Anand, a leading lawyer of the city, was very protective of him. "My father always used to say I was more shy than a shy girl. He had put me in a girls' school in Gurudaspur, and the girls ragged and bullied me, but many would fall for me as I would run away from them into the far away seclusion of my shyness." According to Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai, Dev Anand used to hang around the famed 'Bombay Talkies' studios, waiting for a break in the 1940s and recalled his being an extremely good looking and emotional young man.

After graduating from the prestigious Government College, Lahore, he finally decided to follow his elder brother Chetan Anand, an established filmmaker in Bombay's film world by that time. Chetan inducted Dev into the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) where he interacted with many leading writers, actors, filmmakers and artists like Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Balraj Sahni, Sahir Ludhianvi, K.N. Singh and Shailendra. IPTA was a hub of creative energy where people exchanged ideas, learnt from each other and networked.

The 1940s was also a period when the grandeur of the Studio System led by New Theatres, Bombay Talkies and Prabhat was crumbling and giving way to a new Star system. It was at this point of time that three actors—Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand—were struggling for a foothold. They were to dominate the film world for most of the 20th century. Coincidentally, all three found stardom around the same time.

Raj Kapoor got a big break in Kidar Sharma's *Neel Kamal* (1947) opposite Madhubala. Shaukat Hussain Rizvi's *Jugnu* (1947) was the first major hit for Dilip Kumar opposite singing star Noorjehan. After directing his own film *Aag* (1948), the first major film that converted both Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar into stars, was Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949) opposite Nargis. After struggling with P.L. Santoshi's *Hum Ek Hain* (1946) and Girish Trivedi's *Vidya* (1948) opposite Suraiya, Dev Anand was shot into the limelight with Shaid Lateef's *Ziddi* (1948) opposite a top actress of those days, Kamini Kaushal.

As a star, Dev was class apart from the rather naïve looking Raj Kapoor and the earthy Dilip Kumar. Throughout the golden 50s and 60s, Dev Anand's demeanour, urbanity and quirky mannerisms ruled the heart of urban middle class audiences, especially the young and the fairer sex.

The themes that Navketan picked up had to do with the conflict, crime and social turmoil in urban India after independence and Dev Anand set a role model that represented

the middle classes.

The appeal or magic of Dev Anand perhaps lay in the fact that the image he projected conformed to the contemporary public vision of an ideal Indian man. He seemed to be someone who had been naturally endowed with the outward beauty of a *devata*, a celestial being, the charm and heroic qualities of a hero who did positive and noble deeds in life with a distinctive style that immediately raised him to the position of a romantic figure and a heart throb and placed him a little above the



common mass of struggling human beings.

What made Dev Anand the heartthrob and matinee idol of Indian Cinema for many decades was his romanticism in films. This oozed out through his style both in films and in real life and came across in his autobiography. "There was not a day", he writes, "when Suraiya and I did not meet or talk to each other on the phone. I was in love. Not that I had not fallen in love before. I had been physically and emotionally involved before, and had my share of love-affairs." But the stiff resistance to the relationship posed by Suraiya's grandmother ended the affair with cruelty. "My heart sank, and my whole world shattered. There was no meaning to existence without her. But not living meant killing myself, which would be a negation of all that my inner strength stood for." Dev Anand's survival instincts always made him rise above romantic setbacks.

Before their breakup, both Dev and Suraiya had paired together in seven films—*Vidya* (1948), *Jeet* (1949), *Shair* (1949), *Afsar* (1950), *Nili* (1950), *Do Sitare* (1951) and *Sanam* (1951). All these films were successful at the box office.

As early as 1949, Dev Anand took the initiative to form his

own banner Navketan Films, with his elder brother Chetan Anand whose debut film *Neecha Nagar* (Lowly City, 1946) had already received international acclaim by winning the Golden Palm, at the very first Cannes Film Festival in 1946. Dev Anand dreamt of giving a new dimension to the world of entertainment through Navketan Films. He was a visionary who deftly constructed a team of talented filmmakers, lyricists, music directors and singers.

Afsar (Chetan Anand, 1950), the debut film of Navketan, sank without a trace, but Dev Anand's indomitable will, initiative and dynamism eventually paid off.

This started happening after Dev Anand recognised directorial talent in a young friend, Guru Dutt. A new team was born with ex-BBC broadcaster/actor/screenplay writer Balraj Sahni, debutante Kalpana Kartik, music composer S.D. Burman and lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. The new blockbuster that this team created was the crime thriller *Baazi* (1951) with great music by S.D. Burman that placed Navketan Films on a firm footing. The unique thing about *Baazi* was that it introduced Mona Singha, a new female lead renamed by Chetan Anand as Kalpana Kartik opposite Dev Anand.

After this break, Navketan never looked back. The rapport between Kalpana Kartik and Dev soon turned into a romantic relationship and they got married during the making of *Taxi Driver* (1954) written by Vijay Anand and directed by Chetan Anand.

Dev Anand will remain a legend for producing *Guide*. As a filmmaker it was seminal for Vijay Anand who left R. K. Narayan's 'Guide' behind and recreated Raju's (Dev Anand) character by bringing in philosophical depth. The element of adultery was removed from the film as he was convinced that Indian audiences would not accept it. Dev Anand's Hollywood version of 'Guide' directed by Tad Danielewski had bombed and Vijay Anand refused to toe the line. By bringing in the Hindu philosophical angle, Vijay Anand turned Navketan's *Guide* into an epic. S.D. Burman's compositions and Shailendra's poetic lyrics further raised its impact. *Guide* can be seen as a feminist film as well as one with the exalted philosophical idea of the timeless Bhagavad Gita.

The blockbuster *Jewel Thief* is unique in terms of plot and how it has been edited. The film is about a character which does not exist. It was unbelievable that Vijay Anand could make a film so slick and thrilling immediately after such a deep philosophical work such as *Guide*.

Dev turned to direction from *Prem Pujari* (1970), a film about the Indo-Pak War of 1965. As a filmmaker, his most successful films are *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971) and *Des Pardes* (1978). *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* deals with the problem of drugs and *Des Pardes* about illegal immigration of Indians in the UK. Dev Anand's films after *Des Pardes* started losing their touch with audiences and became somewhat increasingly self-indulgent.

Dev also had the distinction of introducing many talents and fresh faces to popular Indian cinema such as Kalpana Kartik, Zeenat Aman and Tina Munim.

Dev Anand will be remembered for his zest for life, his desire to be active and the positivism that he exuded throughout his life. Like the female lead in *Sunset Boulevard*, he refused to call it a day and accept the changes wrought by the inexorable march of Time. **C** Lalit Mohan Joshi is a London based Indian film historian and documentary filmmaker and edits the thematic journal *South Asian Cinema*.



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