

The NEHU Journal

Special Issue on Literature

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NEHU

The Writer and the Community: A Case for Literary Ambidexterity

Literary ambidexterity is essentially a discourse on the virtues of knowing two languages and writing well in both. In a vast and complex country like India, these languages would mean one's mother tongue and the language of interaction. In my case, they would mean Khasi, the language of my tribe, and English.

Heard and spoken since birth, the mother tongue is of fundamental importance to creative literature. This also relates to the nature of creative writing itself and the need for communication.

As a practitioner of poetry, I believe in a poet who is a witness, one with the seeing eye, a retentive memory and the innate instinct to catch the soul of his generation. My own poetry is deeply rooted and I see my role as a poet as that of a chronicler of subjective realities. I have talked, in my poems, of leaders lording "like the wind" and fickle "like Hindi film stars changing dresses in a song." I have talked of my impoverished land, and with sardonic humour, of real people who are at once individuals and types. I have tried to capture the changing times, aspects of my culture and issues on the fringe.

But chronicling realities is not an end in itself. Pablo Neruda believes that a poet should always live close to his people: "I have gone into practically every corner of Chile, scattering my poetry like seed among the people of my country." Neruda seems to point up the poet's need to communicate with his people. If the foundation of a poet's art rests on his people's life and character, then what

better audience is there than his own people? And if the audience is his own people, then what better language is there to communicate with them than his mother tongue?

I too wish to address my people directly. I would like to tell them of the colossal threat to our land posed by the ceaseless flood of humanity and the growing aggressiveness of migrants. I would like to speak to them of the perils of terrorism and the greater peril of lawmen turning terrorists. I would like to tell them of the absurdity of trying to deny their own roots and the anarchy that follows in forgetting their own identity. I would like to talk of our great festivals, of Weiking, and the vitality of their part in our social life:

Weiking! Weiking!

Spring is back, begin your whirling motions
and let our life live on.

.....
Whirl on, whirl on,

what if some of us
sneer at us for fools?

We are not here to pay obeisance
to the gods for a plentiful harvest
(do we ever have a harvest now?)

whirl on, whirl on to a time
when women stood by their men
and men were tigers guarding
their homes with jealous swords.

(‘Weiking’: self-composed)

But most of all I would like to remind my people, as a poet raconteur, of the virtues of their ancestors’ ways and the necessity of perpetuating them. I would like to talk of our myths and legends and let those, who will, cull lessons from them:

Faraway
from the year dot

Ren, the Nongjri fisherman,
Ren, the beloved of a river nymph
Ren, who loved so madly
 who left his mother and his home
 to live in magic depths
also left a message:

“Mother,” he had said,
“listen to the river,
as long as it roars
you will know that I live”.

(‘Ren’: self-composed)

Symbolically, Ren is asking later generations to listen to the sound of his people’s life. But the sound of a people’s life and their ways can be voiced only through the mother tongue. The mother tongue is the sound of life itself, and in this sense, writing in it would mean for me helping the sound of my people’s life grow stronger.

Czeslaw Milosz and his poem “My Faithful Mother Tongue” have only strengthened this conviction. But the shocking reality that Milosz speaks of his mother tongue as “a tongue of the debased, / of the unreasonable, hating themselves” is unfortunately true of the Khasi language as well. As Milosz again puts it, “perhaps after all it’s I who must try to save you [mother tongue].”

It is in trying to do this, that literary ambidexterity can play a critical role. It is neither desirable nor profitable to keep one’s own writings confined to one’s own language or the language of interaction.

A native author’s work with any literary merit must be brought to the notice of other literatures. As Neruda suggests, it does not matter if one’s poems have sunken their roots deep into one’s native soil; it does not matter if they are born of indigenous wind and rain or have emerged from a localized landscape. If they are worth their salt they must “come out of that landscape... to

roam, to go singing through the world....”

To do this the author must be able to translate his own work into the language of interaction. But if he is not ambidextrous in this sense, then his work must risk lurking forever in the dark recesses of his own small world.

On the other hand, if he writes only in the language of interaction, he must be able to translate his work into his own mother tongue or risk being cut off forever from the heart and mind of his own people.

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih
Associate Editor

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Gary Snyder, the Poet-sage of Wilderness Values

(SARANGADHAR BARAL)

Snyder's views of nature can be best understood in 'no-nature' terms and not in terms of an oppositional epistemology, which traditionally teaches mind versus matter, nature versus culture. To him nature does not mean the low and inauthentic objects into which man alone infuses meaningful significances. In other words, nature is "not a book, but a performance" (*No Nature*, 1992, p-381). In his "Introductory Note" to *Turtle Island* he writes: "the land, the planet itself, is also a living being — at another pace." His sincere reverence for earth raises it to the stature of a power, a deity whom the ancient poets called Mother Earth, Mother Gaia, or Mother *Dhātri* (*Dharitri*<*dhri*:hold), who holds and sustains all life. In a deeper sense, Snyder views nature as 'the vast wild house', which enshrines self, and nature as inter-dependent forces, co-creative processes not to be far from the state of 'self nature', that is, the Original Nature, or the primal principal of Nothingness. His Zen convictions and austere vision, in this context, may be viewed from *Ripples on the Surface*:

The vast wild
the house, alone.

The little house in the wild,
the wild in the house.

Both forgotten.

No nature

Both together, one big empty house.

(*No Nature*, 1992:381)

To get at the poet's meaning through an unfairly simplified language: one comes to know 'no nature,' the absolute reality, when both the wild and the house are "forgotten," and while one is conscious of their inter-relatedness one knows a vast phenomenal reality called "one big empty house" here. In other words, nature, that is, wild nature such as related to no nature is to be understood verily like *samsāra* (the phenomenal world) as related to *nirvāna* or the ultimate real. According to deep Buddhist philosophy, again, there is not the slightest difference between *samsāra* and *nirvāna*. Thus Snyder's concept of nature ultimately operates within Buddhist thought that teaches non-dualism as against all dualistic epistemologies. In the words of the poet nature is an undefinable, elusive principle:

But we do not easily *know* nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfil our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models. There is no single or set "nature" either as "the natural world" or "the nature of things" ...(We have to) acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional.

(*No Nature* : "Preface")

It would be apt to mention here that the Romantic concept of nature hardly approaches Snyder's 'no nature' convictions. On the contrary, his convictions conflict with the Romantic belief in the world of spirit existing behind familiar landscapes or scenes. Because he neither projects his own mind nor seeks a spirit in nature. What he seeks is a non-differentiated consciousness, a unity between self and nature, which, he believes, is attainable in the wilderness conditions of life, at a primal state of communion with wild nature. Therefore, binary principles distinguishing between the soul and "the Not Me" (nature)¹ are apt to disparage the natural world even while it is regarded as infinite. Snyder rightly criticises

the nineteenth century conception of nature's infinity or inexhaustibility as "an imperialist mercantile theory."² It may be said that all dualist thinking is essentially exploitative. On this ground, the poet even sees Confucian humanism as a folly and expresses his displeasure thus: "Get off my back Confucius / There's enough noise now" (*Myths & Texts*: 'Logging', poem no. 10). This is an outright rejection of an insufficient humanism that Confucius taught:

Man is the heart of the universe
the upshot of the five elements,
born to enjoy food and colour and noise...

(*Myths & Texts*: *ibid.*)

This homocentric ancient Chinese virtue is equally reminiscent of Greek humanism, which was reinforced by the Platonic ideal of man as the measure of the universe. But against humanistic idealism the poet upholds the smothered voice of the wood with almost a Lawrentian dig at the Christians:

What bothers me is all those stumps:
What did they do with the wood?
Them Xtians out to save souls and grab land
"They'd steal Christ off the cross
if he wasn't nailed on"

The last decent carpentry
Ever done by Jews.

(*Myths & Texts*: *Ibid.*)

Not only this, Snyder reprimands the fellers of trees as "thugs" and does not spare the prophets of "saw-mill temples". His shaft of criticism is aimed at a whole legacy of ancient and modern humanity, which has pursued its own pleasure and progress against the wilderness.

Pine of Seami, cedar of Haida
Cut down by the prophets of Israel
the fairies of Athens

the thugs of Rome
 Both ancient and modern;
 Cut down to make room for the suburbs
 Bulldozed by Luther and Weyerhaeuser
 Crosscut and chainsaw

Trees down
 Creeks choked, trout killed, roads.

Saw mill temples of Jehovah.

(*Myths & Texts*: *ibid*, poem no. 14)

The poet has further emphasised that “men who hire men to cut groves, kill snake, build cities, pave fields, believe in God, but can’t believe their own senses” (*ibid*, poem no. 15). It becomes obvious then why today’s ecological crisis is an outcome of the accumulated injuries done to earth by the Japanese, the white men, the Jews, the Romans and the Lutherans. Snyder is also aware of China’s deforestation by A.D.1000 and of similar devastations in India by A.D. 800. The prophets of civilization and the progressivists of exclusive human development, in the poet’s views, have committed mistakes, which now choke the lifeline of our planet.

Further, for Snyder, self and nature are forever wild and constitute ‘the vast wild house’, which ultimately points to ‘self-nature’ or Nothingness. This Buddhist thought indicates that the inner and outer worlds are of one single essence, which again is wonderfully empty and void. Thus, to the Zen practitioner, the state of the wilderness is the very ground of man’s being. Snyder maintains:

But a culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its being — from the wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing eco-systems) and from the other wilderness, the wilderness within — is doomed to a

very destructive behaviour, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behaviour.

(*Turtle Island* : "The Wilderness," 1974:106)

That our modern industrial culture is paying a heavy price for such alienation is no exaggeration. Thoreau's wilderness ideal that "in wildness is the preservation of the world"³ sounds more relevant in the present context of all-round environmental depletion. No doubt, Snyder has inherited and enriched the Thoreau tradition. In addition, his deep thought enriches our understanding of the wilderness when he associates it with the unconscious. According to ancient Taoism, Tantrism and Zen Buddhism, the conscious ego, which makes civilized society possible, is the cause of man's unholy alienation from nature as well as from 'self nature'. Therefore, man's true knowledge of self presupposes the deep communion with-wild nature as well as a transcendence of the ego and society. Snyder observes:

"Beyond" there lies, inwardly, the unconscious.

Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet, one step even farther on, as one.

(*Earth House Hold*: 'Poetry and the Primitive', 1969: 122)

Freud's idea of the repression of the unconscious may be one way of explaining modern man's suppression of the wild, the woods, and the weed. Traditionally the Western mind is prone towards such egocentric suppression of the wilderness and *the other*. One remembers how orthodox Christianity unlike Eastern mystical philosophies considers the wilderness as a condition of chaos and views wild nature as the haven for evil spirits. Not only the Eastern traditions but also the Amerindian culture of America as well as the primitive tribes the world over genuinely point to another order of consciousness, a non-dualistic perception, a primal awareness of the world as an indefinable but a living principle. In fact, Snyder's creative works impress the reader by a strong sense

of neo-primitivism. He would even suggest tribalising civilized cultures of the industrial age. In his conviction, this living world is an interdependent wild eco-system called 'interbirth' which remains to be brought into our conscious knowledge and practice, because this primal state sustains "a fundamental and indelible solidarity of life that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of single forms."⁴ Deeply aware of mankind's ancient solidarity with the wild and convinced of the Native Indian's primal consciousness as a higher virtue, the poet "pledges his allegiance to the soil"

of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
on ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun

With joyful interpenetration for all.

(*Axe Handles*: "For All", 1983:113)

Snyder's idea of "joyful interpenetration for all" is not merely a post-modern ecological tenet as it sounds, but it has a solid Buddhist philosophical foundation. The Buddhist principle of 'Dependent Co-origination' (*pratitya-samut-pada*) enunciates that the phenomenal world is of interdependent, co-creative, and contingent things, and thus it is empty of essence. Modern Scientific objectivity has not yet reached this latter Buddhist doctrine of Emptiness, which pronounces the principle of "delight" as opposed to anxiety and self-aggrandisement. The poet maintains:

Delight is the innocent joy arising
with the perception and realisation of
the wonderful, *empty*, intricate,
interpenetrating,
mutually embracing, shining
single world beyond all discrimination
or opposites

(*Turtle Island*: "On As For Poets", p. 133)

Here Snyder's "wonderful, empty" world "beyond all discrimination or opposites" further points to the fact that his ecological conscience passes beyond the fetish of this age. It may also be recalled that his instinctive awareness of the depleted wilderness was voiced in early 1950's while the scientific community was awakened to ecological problems only in the late sixties. His "A Berry Feast", now the opening poem of *The Back Country*, was first performed at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in October 1955, from where the Beat Movement got launched with Ginsberg's "Howl". Snyder's poem illustrates his sustained interest in the subjects of Amerindian folklore and the coyote, the wilderness and Zen. For Thoreau as for Snyder the wild in man never dies and life in communion with the wilderness is forever wonderful. Thoreau's conviction that "the savage in man is never quite eradicated" finds its clear echo in the latter's expression: "the Coyote is forever inside you" (*Turtle Island: "The Call of the Wild"*, p.23). Moreover, Snyder has moved beyond Thoreau and Jeffers by representing nature as the Mother or the Muse whose voice he wants to bring to our knowledge. He regards that voice as "a very real entity" and claims to the spokespersonship for the non-human real. The wilderness is declared to be his "constituency". He states:

The reasons that I am here because I wish to bring a voice from the wilderness, my constituency. I wish to be a spokesman for a realm that is not usually represented either in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government.

(*Turtle Island: "The Wilderness,"* p.106)

Inspired by Taoism, more by totemism, and breezed by his own Zen practice, Snyder is convinced of the Sioux Indian value that regards trees, animals, birds, and fish as 'people' or 'beings'. His wish to bring a voice from the wilderness would presuppose a direct authentic knowledge of its people. And the poet claims that the voice that speaks to him is "the voice of nature herself" (*ibid*, p.107). To recall what he once said, to get sensations of "the grass"

and “stones” even while sitting properly dressed and well shod among civilised people is *his* power (*Axe Handles*: “Money Goes Upstream”) This in a sense authenticates his claim to represent the wilderness people in democratic councils. Actually, this is also a radical redefinition of Whitmanian democracy and Confucian humanism. Such a possibility as the representation of the non-human world indeed makes humanism more humane and democracy more representative.

Thus Snyder’s eco-conscious democratic humanism is a ‘planetary’ norm and passes beyond the limits of ecogism.

By “planetarism” Snyder means a deep earth consciousness, a recognition of solidarity with all the ‘beings’ of nature and also faith in an organic and integrated relationship of humanity with the wilderness and the universe at large. This demonstrates a primitivistic, non-anthropocentric decentralist thinking. He defines “planetary mind” thus:

“Planetary mind” is old-ways internationalism, which recognises the possibility of one earth with all its diversities; “global consciousness” ultimately would impose a non-so-benevolent technocracy on everything via a centralised system.

(*The Real World*: 1980,p.126)

His poetry is deeply informed by “the archaic values on earth” and the poet believes that a living faith in ‘the old ways’ would provide the healing touch to our wounded planet. He has no appreciation for such nationalistic / humanistic slogans as “Defeat is un-American” and “Sovereign Use of Natural Resources”. He has no patience with countries like Japan, Brazil and America, which sell and phase out “the living actual people of the jungle” (*Turtle Island*: “Earth Mother: Her Whales”). Viewed therefore from Snyder’s planetary and bioregional ethics as well as environment friendly philosophy, modern civilisation obviously appears to be exploitative of earth. The poet suggests:

If civilisation

Is the exploiter, the masses is nature,

And the party

Is the poets.

(*Regarding Wave: "Revolution in the Revolution in the Revolution"*)

This is why the poet is very sardonically perceptive of communist as well as capitalist achievements, which historically contribute towards nature-and-mind pollution. Snyder justifies a role for poets to "speak for the green of the leaf," to "speak for the soil" ("Mother Earth: Her Whales"). He does not believe in scientists and bureaucrats as nature's spokesman, because they are mostly "head-heavy power hungry politic" (ibid). Though his stance for the poet is contestable, his suspicion of others is not unfounded. His experience as the U.S. representative in 'the U.N. Conference on Human Environment' at Stockholm in 1972, reinforces his preconceptions. Snyder observed that "the concerns expressed were mostly for ourselves and for further generations of our species," but there was "little talk about trees or animals or wilderness."⁵ A similar conviction is expressed by Oren Lyon, an Iroquois, in his U.N. speech delivered at Geneva in 1977:⁶

I do not see a delegation for the four-footed. I see no seat for the eagles. We forget and we consider ourselves superior, but we are after all a mere part of this creation. And we must consider to understand where we are. And we stand somewhere between the mountain and the ant. Somewhere and only there as part and parcel of the creation.

This reveals an ego-free primal mind that ascribes no privileged place to man in the scale of planetary values. These statements and convictions explain why Snyder identifies himself with the Native American rather than with the white man. He

advocates the underlying spirit of *'Turtle Island'* and pledges his allegiance to its soil. He pleads, "we need a civilisation that can live fully and creatively together with wildness" (*The Practise of the Wild*: 1990,p-6). The eco-poet again accepts Tokyo and New York as 'natural' but finds them deficient in wildness, which only project an exclusive humanism. It is already seen how he has taken due cognizance of the fact that the wilderness outside and the unconscious in man constitute a mystical principle of one living wild continuum, the vast wild house that is truly mankind's home.

It appears that a kind of total revolution of consciousness is the central objective in Snyder's envisioned world, which expresses counter-culture spirit. He strongly believes that 'the ancient path' still practised by many tribes would give a new and sane direction towards the survival of humanity. He highly appreciates the Buddhist Tantric practices which protect both human and wilderness values, and says:

Buddhist Tantrism, or *Vajrayana* as it's also known is probably the finest and most modern statement of this ancient shamanistic-yogic-gnostic-socioeconomic view: that mankind's mother is Nature and Nature should be tenderly respected; that man's life and destiny is growth and enlightenment in self disciplined freedom; *that the divine has been made flesh and that flesh is divine*; that we not only should but do love one another. This view has been harshly suppressed in the past as threatening to both Church and State. Today, on the contrary, these values are seen almost biologically essential to the survival of human faith.

(*Earth House Hold*, P.105)

Nevertheless, Snyder's wilderness philosophy would be misrepresented if it is conceived as singularly concerned with the survival of mankind on the planet. He envisions a deep counter

culture or wilderness culture, which advocates not to extend only the areas of the National Parks, but more importantly also to increase the national parks of the Mind. This is one of Snyder's most radical, creative, post-humanistic values, which pronounces non-self and non-nature convictions. In other words, this teaches to go beyond both self and nature, beyond "man's survival" or "survival of the biosphere". For Snyder this is a workable thesis, because he is deeply convinced that "at the heart of things (there) is some kind of serene and ecstatic process, which is beyond qualities and beyond birth — and death," and which alone causes a new creation to take roots after the cosmic cataclysm (*Turtle Island: "Four Changes"*, p.102).

Viewed from the present state of civilisation's sagacity and human thought, Snyder's counter culture appears to belong to the yet unborn future. However, the poet-sage's vision does compel us to sit and ponder as the planet's as well as the self's sanity has come to a crisis.

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. In the essay, "Nature," Emerson conceptualises nature as "the Not Me", which includes "both nature and art, all other men and my own body". See Spiller, R & Ferguson, Alfred R. 1971. *The Collected Words of R.W. Emerson*, (ed) Cambridge; Mass: BPH-UP; p.8.

2. See Mesch, Harald. 1987 "The Richness of Interface: An Interview with Gary Snyder", *American Studies (German)*, Vol. 32(3); p.381.

3. Thoreau's "Walking". See Atkinson, Brooks. 1937 (ed) *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (New York: Modern Library; p.613).

4. Ernst Cassirer (1944) rightly considers the solidarity of all life on earth as the characteristic conviction of the primal man.

Cited by Highwater, Jamake, 1981. *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America*, Har-Row; pp.68-69.

5. See McKibben, Bill. 1991 (April). "The Mountain Hedonist," *New York Review Bulletin*, 38(7); p.29.

6. Quoted by Hogan, Linda, 1983. *Eclipse: American Indian Studies* (Los Angeles: U. of California; See the section, 'Who Will Speak?', np).

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1. In the essay, "Nature," Emerson conceptualises nature as "the Not Me," which includes "both nature and art, all other men and my own body." See Spiller, R. & Ferguson, Alfred R., 1971. *The Collected Works of R. W. Emerson*, (ed) Cambridge, Mass: BPH-UP, p.8.
2. See Mesch, Harald 1987. "The Richness of Intuition: An Interview with Gary Snyder," *American Studies* (Germany), Vol. 22(1), p.281.
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Book Review

Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast edited by **Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih** and **Robin S. Ngangom**, NEHU Publications, Shillong, 2003, pp.270 + xii, Rs. 230/- .

Undoubtedly it is poetry that unites us. It is the poets who will *not* keep us away from one another, who will not separate us. This is the strongest feeling one gets when one reads these poems from the very different regions of the Northeast of our country.

History and time become the subsequent strengths of these poems, although these are not immediately noticeable in the lines of many poets. It is strange that a poet from Mizoram might be speaking of the same values as a poet from Assam or Manipur; the humane intensity of the poems remains a matter of understanding and ultimate celebrations:

One by one we'll recover
the ornaments of grace.

In a number of poems one is touched by the poet's treatment of the local and the personal, that moves toward an involvement in the collective longing for renewal and the search for a better world.

I have seen several times
the sighing hand of his
among countless hands.

It was Robert Frost who said once that politics deals with grievances, poetry with grief. I do feel that it is important for us to have this anthology at this time, now when a lot of turmoil and violence has shaken the peaceful air of the Northeast. The poems help us see that devotion and anger, hunger and passion, desire and loyalty are not supportive of each other, but lift our minds.

for managing to love
 an object of scorn,
 although
 they place around my neck
 a garland of threats.

These poems have a universal appeal that cannot be denied. Their reach is more to sympathy than to rightness, and more to compassion than to belief. But from the poetry of these peoples, of different cultures, the miseries of contemporary dilemmas are apparent. I felt both pleasure and pain in reading the poems; they pointed out to me what all good poetry in the world is about, irrespective of where they are written, in their insistence that to expect justice out of a long history is impossible to attain. They certainly convey, in spite of our differences, our commonality and mutuality.

This is a remarkable anthology; there is much hope, and considerable faith in these seemingly simple lines that come from places where

the haunting *madhavi* escapes the rustle of spring,
 acrid with the smell of gunpowder.

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Translating Nations, edited by **Prem Poddar**, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus, 2000, 269p.

The notions of nation and nationalism have engaged the minds of social scientists for over two centuries now and yet they seem as elusive as they were in the beginning. Scholars from various

disciplines have come together to come to grips with these notions at different times but more vigorously during the last fifty years or so. No other notions have perhaps sustained the academic interest for so long and across the disciplinary boundaries. There are lull periods in the history of these notions but there never has been a total cease. With the publication of the book under review it is clear that young scholars in the field of literature have taken these notions in a big way though there is no dearth of senior, and indeed very influential, writers from literature in this field. Further some of the most exciting theories and debates related to these notions have been seen in the post-colonial literature. One of them is about their future, which has been a matter of much speculation by both anthropologists and literateurs.

Translating Nations is one of the latest works in this field. It includes ten articles, including the introductory one by the editor. The book is a collection of different voices on the nation but spoken in similar language, or made similar by the editor's translating! The vocabulary of the nation that has been built up over the years is abundantly distributed over the various chapters; often making the authors appear interchangeable. This is a serious problem in any translation of culture, whether it is a cultural idiom or a cultural symbol. This well justifies the focus of this book which deals with the problems of representing nations by translated texts for they are not only translated but are often transformed.

One of the current themes in social sciences in many parts of the world is violence. The study of violence is intimately connected with the field of human rights studies, which is also a growing field today. This theme has not escaped the attention of the contributors to this volume and they have been able to touch areas that a social scientist normally cannot reach due to her/his obsession with facts and evidences. In fact, the violent aspect of the nation is one of the most important, if not the most important, themes of this book, as evident from the introductory chapter itself.

There is no dearth of dilemmas in the book, often lurking behind innocuous concepts. The authors, including most prominently the editor himself, show a strain between nationalism and trans-nationalism. While they articulate various identities, they show their own ambivalence about it. Nationalism seems to indicate personal security but intellectual insecurity whereas trans-nationalism gives intellectual security but personal insecurity. There is some kind of craving in this book for both, for one can easily blend both, harbouring one inside and the other outside. In short, this book depicts what most of us intellectuals truly are. It is a naked form of ours that many of us might not have seen. It is certainly worth seeing in black and white for our own benefit.

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Humanities and Pedagogy : Teaching of Humanities Today edited by **K.C. Baral**, Pencraft International; New Delhi, 2002 price Rs.100/-; PP 159.

Humanities and Pedagogy Teaching of Humanities Today attempts at a constructionist's viewpoint on the teaching of humanities today, particularly in the Indian context with its association of inter-disciplinary (post modern?) concepts. The essays holistically brought together are part of an international seminar held in Shillong under the auspices of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages.

The essays are structured on two largely defined points or categories, one is the need for modern or post-modern dialectics cutting across disciplinary barriers and the other attacks the very need and basis of such a *diktat*. For example J.C. Mahanti's essay: "Literature as a Discipline of Thought: the Why of Literary

Pedagogy” demythicises the need for “the new critical, structuralist, post-structuralist, post-colonial nationalist, post-modern Marxist and Feminist...” modes of pedagogy pleading on the other hand for the innate good sense of literature with “teachers who proceed from their experience of life and literature...”

Similarly S. Nagarajan’s critique restores the Keatsian sense of ‘negative capability’, which is the intrinsic logic of a text. He contends that this is the spirit or ‘approach’ to the study of literature. However Nigel Joseph’s “The Idea of ‘Truth’ in the Humanities” is a radicalisation of the teaching of humanities; “A greater openness, within each humanities’ discipline, to developments in the other humanities as well as to those in the social and natural sciences”. The cornerstone of today’s pedagogy as one might put it is the “opening out of disciplines”. Nigel Joseph’s exegesis refreshingly avoids jargon and clichés to speak for a humanistic yet inter-disciplinary approach to the study of humanities. Cross-cultural some might call it yet Joseph’s metabolism is shorn of any jargon-hype or the present polemics of post modernism.

This then evinces that the essays hinge on an internal dialectic of ‘truth’ on the one hand and the sophism of modern thinking and intellectual trends on the other. By highlighting an inter-disciplinary yet pragmatic rationale Joseph does not deliberate any idiom or an arid Waste Land. His is “a plea for cultural rapprochement ...a genuine eclecticism.” The cross-cultural hypothesis is indeed very much present in the essays, the ‘Indian’, reading of an American or English text. That is why perhaps as A.V. Ashok in “English in India Today: Discipline, Post-discipline and Indiscipline” asseverates (almost triumphantly one senses) there is today the prevalence of English Literature “deconstructors”. So we have the departments of English Studies and not necessarily that of English Literature. The pedagogy borders on this kind of subversivism. This also is perhaps a heresy: a decolonising of literature (i.e. English Literature) and thought. English studies in India today remain largely disturbed as a result of such a refrain: a post-modern clique has attempted some kind of an iconoclasm, or a transcendence of certain verities.

The language literature / epistemological connection is Mohan Ramanan's answer to literary problematics. On the one hand there are the advocators of the *bhasa* primacy as the dominant cultural synergy and on the other there are at times the effete-ness of English teaching. What should the teachers of English do in such a crisis caught as they are in troubled tunes or in that of a post-modern indiscipline, its wave of antipathy attacking the very citadels of a cherished tradition? Mohan Ramanan's "English Agonistes, Reflection on English in India" debates with fortitude on the middle path, 'the humanist centric vision of teaching and learning. Once again this to my thinking is an invitation to cross-culturalism to invade the territories of our higher education in the humanities disciplines.

There is thus "modernism's epistemological failure" as Glenn Bowman argues in the last essay of the book: "Constituting the Space of Identification in Anthropological Discourse". The epistemic or knowledge processes are caught in this tangle between theoretic devices and the need to synergise, the need to synthesize. This is the basic problematic, which the book articulates in attempting to revisit dichotomously the epistemic domains of literature, philosophy and culture. M. M. Agrawal's "Education as a Cultural Process" speaks critically of a "cultural alienation of education". Has education served its purpose of cultural assimilation or has it led to the growth of more alienation? This is the ontological question here. The essay is a nostalgic reflection on getting 'education back to where it belongs'. K.C. Baral's "Critical Theory and Pedagogy" applies certain critical precepts to the author/text/reader polemics. Literature is applied criticism, which seems to go against the Arnoldian standpoint of criticism.

The essays/papers are interrogative in nature asking some very fundamental questions as to the need of addressing the teaching of the humanities with discourses or subtexts. However pedagogy is some kind of a given assumption, most of the essays fail to take into account the cognisable reality or the 'why' of pedagogy: the teaching methodologies as it were.

Today the scenario has witnessed a virtual expansion of the classroom; such ramifications have been due to the influence of the media and technology. In this cultural context the essays of D. Venkat Rao and Bernard Sharrat capture this new technological revolution and ambience; applying it to the practices of teaching / learning. D. Venkat Rao in his "Critical Pedagogy and Global Networks, Re-turning English Today" argues that "Digitalacy is literacy...in digital media;" a seminal statement. Sharrat in his essay "Teaching, Multimedia and the Internet" delightfully countenances the argument for a virtual classroom. On-line learning is self-learning. The essay borders on Distance Education aspects of pedagogy.

The book collectively provides not only ample food for thought on dialogic discourses but is a daunting intellectual exercise in the need for a re-defined pedagogy mostly shorn of exhibitionism or vapid writing which is clichéd. The articles are insightful, evolving cultural contexts or broad frameworks to take us into the embattled areas of knowledge /information dichotomies.

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

1. All contributions should be sent in electronic form as well as hard copy printed on A4 size paper in double space and with adequate margin on the left side. Notes and references should be numbered in Arabic numerals, with details provided as endnotes. The title of the paper, the author's name and address should be typed on a separate cover-sheet. Telephone & fax numbers, e-mail ID's and **a brief biographical sketch** should be provided.
2. Non-English words should be italicised or underlined. Spelling should be British. Quotations should be reduced to a minimum and where used should be put under double inverted commas or if necessary indented. Quotations of more than 50 words from published or copyright sources should have the permission of the author/publisher enclosed with the manuscript.
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