The NEHU Journal

Special Issue on Literature

Jayanta Mahapatra
Sarangadhar Baral
Nigel Jenkins
Nandini Bhattacharya
Robin S. Ngangom
Esther Syiem
S. J. Duncan
Debabrata Deb
Vanneihtluanga
Anima Dutta
Keisham Priyokumar
Easterine Iralu
Temsula Ao
Desmond L Kharmawphlang
Emmanuel Narendra Lall
Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih
Bevan L Swer

Vol 1 No 2
July, 2003

The NEHU Journal

Editor : **T B Subba**
Associate Editor : **Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih**

Production Assistants : Surajit Dutta & Binod Rynjah
Layout and Design : Shongdor Diengdoh

The NEHU Journal is published bi-annually (January-July) by the North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong. The focus of the Journal is on India's Northeast and countries bordering it. Articles on other areas are also welcome. Contributors are advised to consult notes at the back.

Subscriptions

Single issue	- Rs 55.00 / $ 2
Single year	- Rs 100.00 / $ 4
Two years	- Rs 175.00 / $ 6
Three years	- Rs 250.00 / $ 8

**The rates above stand revised from the next issue.*

Payment may be made by cheque/draft payable to "NEHU Pubications" and be sent to the Deputy Director, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Laitumkhrah, Shillong-793003. Outstation cheques/ drafts may kindly add Rs. 10/- or $ 1 towards bank service charges.

All correspondence related to the Journal may be addressed to the Editor, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003.

The NEHU Journal

Vol.1, No. 2, July 2003

NEHU

EDITORIAL THEME

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

CONTENTS

Nongkrem Dance, Most Ancient and Renowned of Khasi Festivals

NIGEL JENKINS

The Nongkrem Dance, five days of dancing, goat sacrifice and revelry, is the most ancient and renowned festival of the Khasis.

The tourist-bereft Government of Meghalaya would no doubt like it to become a tourist attraction, but the festival has, proudly resisted any move to turn it into some folksy cultural peepshow. What is done at the Nongkrem Dance has been done, with little alteration in the protracted and complex rituals, for perhaps hundreds of years. It is exuberant ceremonial art, with high religious purpose and deep social meaning.

The missionaries, of course, hated it — or, at best, affected disdain. Khasi dances in general, opined the Rev. Griffith Hughes in 1890, were characterised by "plenty of sound, but not a lot of music . . . These dances, together with the archery competitions, represent the Khasis at their most barbarian. The language used by the boy dancers is lewd in the extreme." Until the missionaries left, it was an offence meriting instant banishment from the Church even to witness a traditional dance. Such anathemas are fading history by now, and there is considerable regret among Christians that so many families were persuaded to sell or melt down the crowns of silver and lariats of bobbled gold that were handed down over generations for their daughters to wear in the dance.

The *Pomblang bad Shad Khyrim* (goat-killing dance of Khyrim), to give the Nongkrem festival its full name, is held every autumn not in the boulder-strewn village of Nongkrem

itself but a mile down the road in Smit, whither it transferred in 1830. Smit, about ten miles south-east of Shillong, is approached through rolling fields of cabbages, cauliflowers, lettuces, potatoes: the orangey earth of the Hills, which looks as if it has been stained by countless centuries of *kwai-juice* gobbed upon it, is so fertile that it could probably turn a row of broomsticks into an orchard overnight.

The village of Smit is a ramshackle clutter of concrete boxes built down two sides of a scrubby triangle of grass. There is nothing to prepare one for the breath-catching magnificence of what heaves into view at the far end of the village green: the great bow-backed palace of the Syiemship of Khyrim, the very hub of Khasidom, and inspiriting powerhouse of today's cultural reawakening. Presiding over a pristine gritsand arena, and freshly thatched with sun-grass, the *ling Sad,* as it is called, looks like an upturned boat or a huge turtle. This style of building — or small, family-sized versions of it — used to be found all over the Hills, but few are seen today.

The *Ïing Sad* at Smit, the last of its kind, is in essence a *llys,* comparable to the court of a medieval Welsh prince. It is the home of the ruling family of Khyrim, which is one of the twenty-five Khasi states; it is the seat of government and justice; it is a place for artistic patronage and the telling of stories. It is also a building of religious significance: at its dark centre is a sacred oak pillar swathed in bamboo matting, with a picket fence around its base. It represents the golden ladder or tree linking heaven and earth, and no one except the *sohblei* (high priest)—not even the Syiem himself — is allowed to touch it.

Long before the Europeans arrived in the Hills, the Khasis had evolved a distinct and elaborate form of democracy which still subsists beneath the overlay of Indian national and state authority, The Syiem, therefore, is in no sense a potentate: he is appointed through a democratic procedure, and remains accountable to the people. It used to be said that to be elected Syiem, a man had to be

both mature and personable, and could abandon all hope of becoming Syiem if he was blind, deaf or lacking a moustache. The present incumbent, the affable — and moustached — Dr. Balajied (chosen one) Sing Syiem, who is also a medical practitioner in Shillong, would seem to be handsomely qualified for the job.

Thanks to an introduction from Desmond [Kharmawphlang], I was privileged during the festival to be invited inside the *Ïing Sad,* where I took tea and biscuits with the *Syiem Sad* (queen mother).

The palace is raised about five feet above the ground, and fronted by a deep verandah with huge oak-trunk supports. Not a single nail was used in the building's construction, the use of metal— particularly iron— being considered taboo. Nor is the palace supplied with electricity: the only light in the large central chamber comes from a small square of glass in the thatch overhead. Most of the *Syiem Sad's* furniture had been removed: for the past three weeks the palace had been home to the Syiem's musicians whose every waking hour had been devoted to intense rehearsal. There were just a few benches and, immovable in the centre of the room, the sacred hearthstone, around which food is prepared and eaten, stories are told and tribal lore is imparted by the maternal uncle. There was no fire that warm day, although the cosy savour of wood smoke hung everywhere. The only competing smell was a sharp punge of goat wafting from a side-room where the sacrificial bleaters awaited their fate.

The three-week Nongkrem observances, only the last few days of which are a public celebration, begin when the Syiem sends to every corner of Khyrim a small chaplet of cane, each with a distinct arrangement of knots which can be 'read', informing the various localities about the tributes that are expected from them: goats, roosters, hurdles of thatch and free labour. The first formal function is the ritual re-roofing of the *Ïing Sad.* The Syiem's priest initiates the proceedings by climbing to the apex of the roof, where

he prays to God for a successful re-roofing and a prosperous new year. Then he cuts away the first wad of old thatch. The whole community turns out to share in the work of stripping the roof, cleaning and washing the exposed interior, and re-thatching. The job must be finished by nightfall.

The *Ïing Sad* is then ready for the musicians. As the Twenty- four Metres are to Welsh poetry, so are the Thirty-two Rhythms to Khasi music. The Syiem's musicians, particularly the drummers, have to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the Thirty-two Rhythms, each of which has a specific role to play in the Nongkrem Dance. Their weeks of rehearsal are necessary not only to hone their musical skills but to bring their bodies up to pitch: they are required to beat and blow for hours on end, and need to be in good physical shape for nearly a week's hard labour with little rest.

The drums, cymbals and ramping pipes of these half dozen musicians are the Nongkrem festival's musical turbine, accompanying not only the dances but the chicken eviscerations and goat sacrifices. There's plenty of whooping and yelling by both dancers and onlookers, but in all other respects the music is non-vocal. R. T. Rymbai, a Seng Khasi leader, explains: "A Khasi believes in a God who is good and kind and who would not fail him. He also believes that gratitude is the highest form of virtue, and that God desires him to live his life fully. Hence the festivals. When a Khasi is happy, he shouts, he laughs, he dances. When he is sad he sings mournful songs. And so in his festivals, you find him laughing and dancing, but do not find him singing."

The snaking stridor of the oboe-like *tangmuri* has about it the blood-thrilling earthiness of vintage Beefheart. It makes hair-raising, narcotically beguiling music: no wonder it had the missionaries worried.

If Irish dancers are motionless above the waist and frenetic below, and the arm-jiving Bretons are wild on top and cataleptic

about the legs, the Khasi dancer could be considered a combination of the two: her top half Irish, her lower half Breton . . . as still as a statue. But look at her bare feet, just visible beneath the hem of her layers of, velvet and silk: they may never break contact with the ground, but those feet are on the move, no doubt of it, inch by inch their busy toes are edging them forward. Why, in half an hour or so she and her co-virgins — the dancers must be virgins— will probably have completed a circuit of the Smit arena. And look again at her body, that "perfect parallelogram", as Henry Yule put it: there is, yes, the breath of a pulse radiating from the region of her lower torso, and the hint of a lilt in the plumes that rear from her silver crown . . . suggesting that in her unstill depths she is by no means immune to the music's earthy proposals.

The girls, laden with gold and red-coral bead necklaces, chains, bracelets and ear-rings, seem to wheel as slowly in their anti-clockwise course as a spiral galaxy. At the motive core of this gyre is the Syiem's sister, the 'queen,' who is protected from the sun by a pink parasol held by a gentleman in a dark suit.

The men dancers, by contrast, are a red-silk blur of busyness, cavorting round the outside of the circle with a sword erect in the right hand, a whisk of silk twitching flamboyantly in the left. Plumes of rooster or peacock feathers sway from their turbans, and silver quivers and arrows rattle at their waists. The only sartorially discordant note is the footwear: plimsolls here, clumping boots there, and cost - accountant's socks.

The dance is an enactment of the social relationships in Khasi society — and a reminder, according to Kynpham [Sing Nongkynrih], of traditional roles.

"The men are always on the outside of the women," he said. "It serves to remind our people that men are the protectors of the land and women the keepers of the home."

Of the dozens of goats sacrificed during the festival, only one is a 'sanctified' goat. His sacrifice is therefore of particular

significance. But it is not, Kynpham stressed, a sacrifice to God. "That would be a great transgression," he said. "God has given it to man to rule over the earth, over every other creature. In our religious ceremonies we offer our sacrifices only to a trinity that we find everywhere — *Thawlang* (the first ancestor), *Iawbei* (the first ancestress), and *Suidnia* (the first maternal uncle)."

The first ancestor in this case is U Shillong, founder of the state of Khyrim which, until the British started to divide and rule, also embraced the rich and powerful state of Mylliem. U Shillong, who has an almost God-like status among the Khasis, was believed to dwell in a sacred grove near the summit of the 6,000 feet high Shillong Peak. Imagine, then, the outrage felt throughout the land when the Ministry of Defence uprooted the entire grove to build a sprawling communications base for the Eastern Air Command. Where once there towered the holiest oaks of Ri Khasi, there bristles now a metal scrubland of satellite dishes, antennae and masts rooted in acres of concrete, all fenced against intruders with twee mottoes like "Vigilance is the price of freedom" or "Know your limitations -then exceed them". Desmond gives voice to "U Lei Shyllong, /Lord Protector of this land," in one of his poems:

> Men no longer call me
> these days, and without
> shame or consideration
> strip me bare
> of my green raiments . . .
> . . . now I stand guard
> with a monstrosity planted
> deep within me
> to watch over this land
> like a single evil eye.

But men do still call U Shillong, at least during the Nongkrem Dance. The rooster sacrifice to the first ancestor takes place on the same afternoon as the sacrifice of the sanctified goat. The

toothless (and today, shoeless) old *sohblei,* who is master of the sacrificial ceremonies, explained to me beforehand that he would be examining the entrails for a red or black blemish; he hoped not to find one because this would be a bad omen not only for the Syiem but the state of Khyrim in general. A few years ago he had detected such a mark, and there had followed a bad year for the farmers, with excessive wind, rain and hail.

As his breath indicated, he had already been slaking his sacramental thirst, the consumption of rice liquor being required priestly practice. Padding around in his nylon socks was also, he smiled, part of the job.

When a crowd of perhaps a thousand had assembled, the Syiem and the *sohblei* led the sacrificial party slowly through the village, flanked by a dozen musketeers letting out high-pitched whoops as they fired their flintlocks heavenward, showering the musicians behind them with a confetti of blasted newspaper tamping. Behind the band glided the queen under her pink umbrella, and a phalanx of lesser dignitaries. Bringing up the rear was the sanctified billy, nudging and butting his harassed minder.

The procession made its way to a plateau half way up a grassy hillock on the outskirts of the village. The crowd, now grown to two or three thousand, took up positions around the edge of the killing and dancing pitch, and the priest and two assistants sat down on a large rectangular stone. Behind them, on chairs, sat the turbanned Syiem and company, including his besuited secretary of state — a portly Presbyterian, who had explained to me earlier that there were no theological difficulties with his being an onlooker, as long as he didn't participate.

The first to feel the sacrificial blade was the rooster. To the tireless battery of the pipes and drums, the *sohblei* splashed liquor and powdered rice over the quizzical-looking bird, not forgetting to help himself to copious libations. Then he took a knife and sawed rapidly at the rooster's throat, leaving the bird to bleed to death

before voyaging into its interior. Within a few minutes he was hauling festoons of intestine from the rooster's corpse, scrutinising every steaming inch for the stigmata of doom. Judging by his boozy smiles all seemed to be well in that department.

The goat, meanwhile, had been getting restless, and was making increasingly determined efforts to butt its minder in the balls, much to the spectators' loud amusement. As the goat's moment approached, the flustered minder and some helpers dragged the unmanageable beast to the middle of the pitch, and the Syiem stepped forward with an armful of fresh banana leaves to calm him down. The drums and *tangmuri* had reached a feverish intensity, but the goat, now munching serenely, was oblivious at last to the antics of humankind. And as the goat stood there, head down, savouring his cud, a man in ceremonial robes danced to his side, raised a scimitar high with both hands, and swept the blade down-down and clean through the animal's neck, instantaneously severing the head.

There was widespread relief, as the head was delivered to the *sohblei,* that the cut had been a clean one: to have botched the job, to have had to use more than one blow is held to be a very bad omen indeed. But what of the guts and, above all, the lungs? The animal's torso was carried at a trot to a grassy slope behind the altar-stone, where it was lost beneath a huddle of experts, all shouting advice and banter at a drunken old fumble-thumbs wielding the carving knife. He had managed to unravel the intestines, which were piled up near the genitals, but he was making no headway with the lungs.

"Oh, come on, boys," joked one of the younger men, "let's all go and have a drink, we can come back later and finish this."

They all, except fumble-thumbs, burst out laughing. Then suddenly he stood, sweating and triumphant, brandishing the lungs. They were radiantly pink and, yes, U Shillong be praised — he put the severed windpipe to his lips and blew them up like balloons—

yes, pink and blemish-free. The signs were propitious: Khyrim was in for a good year.

The disembowelling party hastened to the *sohblei* and the Syiem with the news. The lungs were handed to the Syiem who inflated them for all to see, then gave the signal for the dancing to commence.

The dances that followed were male-only. Two teams of six dancers came forward in pairs. They placed their swords on the altar stone, made obeisance to the Syiem and *sohblei,* then, taking up their swords, initiated the protracted *shad mastieh* (dance of the men). This was a sequence of war dances involving cock-like scuffings of the turf, boastful prancing with swords and whisks, and stylised feints and lunges. In one dance, small boys in full tasselled regalia attempted to imitate the movements of the men, drawing laughter and warm applause from the spectators. They also enjoyed the Syiem dancing with an assistant priest, particularly when a little dog started yapping at their chieftain's heels, and he had to chase it from the pitch at sword-point.

As I watched the dancing an exuberant Father Sngi, in turban and billowing *dhoti,* bounded up to shake my hand. "A wonderful sacrifice," he beamed. " A tremendous day for Khyrim and all the Khasis. What it shows is that these people still believe that Iewduh market in Shillong belongs to them, in spite of the British giving it to Mylliem for help in the war against Tirot Singh. Yes, oh yes, a thrilling sacrifice! Everyone is so happy."

The dancing ceased at sunset, although the musicians, now visibly tired, continued to play, *rallentando,* as the sacrificial meats were loaded into a conical basket and carried downhill by a female bearer. We all then followed her, as slowly as we had come, back through the village, the children shouting and laughing, the men and women smiling their *kwai-red* smiles, as the muskets blattered flames at the gibbous moon.

High in the electric blue ahead of us stood Venus; beneath her loomed the hump-backed silhouette of the *Ïing sad.* And into that celestial darkness, one after another— Catholic, Presbyterian, orthodox Khasi and parasol pink as the lungs of a goat — the *tangmuri* drew them.

Nigel Jenkins** is a renowned Welsh author and poet. He lives at Mumbles near Swansea, Wales, and is currently engaged in compiling **The Encyclopaedia of Wales** for Harper Collins. The write-up is extracted from his award-winning book, **Gwalia in Khasia.

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.

Jayanta Mahapatra, *a renowned Indian poet writing in English. He currently edits* **Chandrabhaga,** *a prestigious literary journal. He lives at Tinkonia Bagicha, Cuttack, Orissa, 753001*

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.

T.B. Subba, *a Professor of Anthropology, NEHU. He is the Editor of The NEHU Journal.*

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 effeteness 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 "Digitaracy 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.

Dr. A.S. Guha, *Regional Director of IGNOU, Shillong, Nongthymmai Pohktieh, Shillong 13.*

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.

3. Contributors shall be given a copy of the journal. Those interested in reviewing books or have received review copies from publishers should write to the Editor with some indication of their field of specialisation.

4. Contributions accepted for the Journal are not normally returned. Authors are therefore advised to keep a copy of their articles to facilitate reply to any queries, the Editor and/or referee(s) may have. All articles, book reviews and enquiries should be sent to the Editor, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003.

The responsibility for the facts stated and opinions expressed is wholly that of the contributors and the Editor and the North-Eastern Hill University Publications accept no responsibility for them.