

# The NEHU Journal

Special Issue on Literature

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# *The NEHU Journal*

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# *The NEHU Journal*

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## 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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## **The Beginning of Mantra : Indian English Poetry Today**

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Of the hundreds of poetry collections that have appeared and served the Indian reading public in the last forty years, hardly more than fifty can be taken serious note of. I mention forty years because India gained her independence in 1947; and we could, safely, associate literary movements in poetry (and fiction) with the easing of tensions and a feeling of freedom that since then has prevailed all over the country. The post-Independence climate was greatly helpful in nurturing a new generation of writers — who believed themselves to be free to use their own regional languages to put forward the intimate credos and illusions they lived with. Whether the results produced by these writers turned out to be serious poetry or not is debatable; nevertheless, we look upon such attempts, which tended toward the confessional and symbolic, as attempts furthering the intellectual climate around the country.

It has always appeared difficult for anyone to come to terms with the Indian poetry scene. The vastness of the subcontinent, with its varied regions, the different people and their separate, isolated languages, often belies the suggestion made in certain circles that the many literary movements cohere in a single Indian vision. Even a very generalized study of the writing in the different languages reveals the fallaciousness of this statement. Following independence, the gradual subdivision of the country into many linguistic regions undeniably gave writers added fervour to pursue their feelings in their respective languages; and by the sixties, a considerable growth in writing and serious literary discussion was evident. Creative writing appeared to be a major preoccupation.

With the establishment of the National Academy of Letters (known here as the Sahitya Akademi), which, by awarding national literary prizes, accorded much-needed recognition to writing done in the various Indian languages, a new era was established. And perhaps, the improved status accorded to men of letters by the general public was a pleasing change. Poets and writers did seem to be more talked about, although the usefulness of creative writing in a society still plagued by hunger and staid values remain a doubtful issue. It was not simply that there was a sudden demand for reading matter of every kind, but the emphasis on freedom of speech and freedom of thought encouraged by the new government gave men of letters a fairly privileged place in the aspirations of the community. Truly speaking, even today there is no broad popular demand for original writing, and the bulk of poetry produced in the years after 1947 has been, in fact, little more than an application of old attitudes and well-proven techniques to a new source of material that arose from the frank quality and the confessional note (particularly on matters of love and sex) no longer restricted by missionary or moral censorship. And so, in almost every language including English, there was an effusion of poems focussed on a central "I".

But wouldn't it be appropriate to ask whether this frank, almost brutal and self-indulgent poetry which took root in India was a consequence of the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* in 1959? Open, public introspection of a poet's life and family became more or less fashionable as many writers followed suit. In a poem "The Hindoo: He Doesn't Hurt a Fly or a Spider Either," A.K. Ramanujan wrote soon afterward:

... Maybe it's once again my  
great swinging grandmother,  
and that other (playing at  
patience centred in his web)  
my one true ancestor,  
the fisherman lover who waylaid her

on the ropes in the Madras harbour,  
 took her often from behind  
 imprinting on her face and body  
 (not to speak of family tree  
 or gossip column)

Lasting impressions of his net:  
 till, one day, spider—  
 fashion, she clamped down and bit him  
 while still insider her,  
 as if she'd teeth down there —

Nissim Ezekiel, who is considered one of our foremost poets writing in English, wrote these lines in a poem in his book *The Unfinished Man*, published in 1960.

Whatever the enigma,  
 The passion of the blood,  
 Grant me the metaphor  
 To make it human good.

And, once again, in a sort of autobiographical poem titled *Background, Casually*, Ezekiel talks of the religious discord he experienced in his childhood:

I went to Roman Catholic school,  
 A mugging Jew among the wolves.  
 They told me I had killed the Christ,  
 That year I won the scripture prize,  
 A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.

Such attempts at introspection continued. Poets like Kamala Das began to write frankly, perhaps a little cruelly. Das discussed her life and marriage and her loves, with all the suffering and blood, measuring out their lives in her poems with artistic exuberance, in the manner of poets like Sylvia Plath:

Gift him all,  
 gift him what makes you woman,

the scent of long hair,  
 the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
 the warm shock of menstrual blood  
 and all your endless female hungers.

Even Ezekiel's *Nudes*, a cycle of poems which he wrote much later, drifts about in the same air of superficial intimacy:

Did you enjoy it? No? You have  
 to love the other person, then you do.  
 Never mind, you love my breasts, thighs,  
 buttocks, don't you? Of course you do.

## II

If one studies carefully the literature produced in the many languages during the years preceding independence, one is disappointed by the absence of any work of classic dimensions, the absence of some work of "greatness." The significant tradition of epic verse inherent in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and later, of Sanskrit poetry, appeared to die away, as though the verse got choked in its own incantatory, sonorous qualities. One is tempted to ask: Where then is this tradition, cultural and literary, of which we Indians are so proud? How is it that we can only continue to speak of the early Sanskrit works with pride and passion? And how can we explain this existence of a vacuum in the literary scene around the country in the hundred years or more prior to 1947?

It seems right to suggest that, at this point of time, English, which had come as legacy of British rule, began to be widely accepted for general and literary use. A seriousness in the intentions of poets writing in English became evident. This happened side by side with the development of poetry in the regional languages, when the new and unpretentious voice of the poet came to be heard. Not only was there a washing of dirty linen in public in the poems, but

both a sincerity and a nausea which urged poets to deal with their "inner" voices — something which hadn't been done before.

A chasm therefore remains. It was only after India became independent that writing everywhere around the country seemed to pick up the momentum and liveliness that had been lacking so far. Could this apparent laxity in serious literary pursuit be taken as a result of the colonisation the Indian people were subjected to, leaving them with a subdued will, an impotence that only made them gaze far behind, soporific, at the thin sails of the epic poems of thousands of years ago?

Poetry in both the regional languages and in English took on that decisive boost after the spirit of modernism broke in upon the nation's literary frontiers. T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats were its gods. The new practitioners of this verse reacted through the amenities of Imagism, in the simple perception of things in themselves. And even today, Eliot's subtle influence upon the contemporary Indian poet cannot be denied. The prominent writers of poetry today are, in general, academics who teach English literature courses in colleges or universities; exposed to English and American writing, they are consequently influenced by them.

Indeed, English departments throughout the length and breadth of India are fed upon English poetry from Eliot to Wordsworth as though upon the dugs of a mother; no university syllabus seems to be free of it. Our own poetry, it appears, has to be weighed against its British counterpart by critics and academics to know its worth. And our poets, blissfully unaware of movements in neighbouring countries, still look beyond the seas to Britain and the United States of America.

### III

Today, although each region of India has its own language to work

with, English continues to be the second most significant language for literate Indians everywhere. The link role of English appears almost impossible to do away with, in spite of the ardent protagonists of Hindi; the position of English is certainly vital to the needs of the community. For, along with the literatures of the various states, English writing in India has become relevant in its own way, and no one can ignore its growing importance side by side with regional literatures.

In the beginning I said that much poetry has appeared in the post-independence era, in English. I find it hard to find reasons for this spurt in English writing, but almost half of the total number of books published in India per year is in English. Many or most are not worth mentioning. A disorderly growth, the writers of this English verse are rooted to various regions of the country, regions that have their own rich regional literatures. One feels that there is no link among them and their writings save that all of them write in English. But unlike our regional writings, which seem confined to their respective regions, this literature *does* go around the country and is noticed by the few for which it is intended. To a certain extent, therefore, English writing can be taken as a national literature because Hindi is severely restricted to the central territory of India.

If we believe that English poetry in India has a definite direction today, we can trace its influence to a mere handful, among them notably to Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan. It is easy to find evidence of their debt to English and American poets, but there can be no denying the fact that they have been able to adapt the resources of English to their own needs and to respond to the particular situations in which they live. In other words, "Indianness" determines their sensibilities and moulds their poems into suggestive language and meaningful patterns. This basic Indianness, which arises from emotions, habits and attitudes, is a bit to give this poetry a direction, naive though it may be at times. Perhaps it would be unfair to slight the desire for such an

Indianness in Indian English-language poetry, especially when one realizes that a conscious striving for Indianness could become a poor substitute for good poetry. The poems of Dom Moraes, for example, do not reveal that quality of Indianness; still, they are good poems, which can be placed beside the poems of any good British poet without the reader being aware that Moraes was born in India and has spent (he still lives here) most of his life in India.

But probably this is exactly what an Indian reader does *not* want. This discerning reader does not wish to read merely a good, well-crafted poem from an Indian poet, a poem that could have come from a poet in Britain or Australia. The Indian sensibility is something different from the Western, and a poem may well reflect this without being linguistically rooted in Indian culture. Strangely enough, Ramanujan, whose work is pervaded with this sense of Indianness, has been away from his native India for years. He must be relying on his memories to work out his own poems. And Ramanujan exhibits a concern for poetic craftsmanship, which makes him one of our most satisfying poets writing in English.

Leaving aside the search for cultural moorings which seems to be a major preoccupation of Indian poets writing in English (e.g., Kamala Das's statement: "I am an Indian, very brown, born in/Malabar, I speak three languages, write in/ two, dream in one," and Nissim Ezekiel's resolution: "I have made my comments now/This is one: to stay where I am,") the ironic approach to situations appears to satisfy the Indian English poet in the making of his poem. This is where the Indian English poet differs from his regional counterpart; because the language itself, i.e., English has been used to make him an outsider in the situation the poet finds himself in. And often, this framework of irony in the poem becomes instrumental in removing the essence of Indian life, its predicament and its vitality. This is where Indian poetry in English sorely fails:

A puff of deodar rustles  
 through a girl's skirt  
 and two tender legs  
 gyrate the air into fuzzy yearnings.

(Kumar: Subterfuges)

Much ugliness here, the substance of Indian girlhood is missing.

#### IV

I should like to end this by talking a little about myself, as one who lives and writes in Orissa, a poor state on the eastern coast of India. It is but natural, therefore, that I would feel and express myself as an inhabitant of Orissa. My own writing would therefore go on to portray values and cultural factors native to Orissa, and not bound to other regions of India. And perhaps I have written about myself in my poems, only in relation to the soil of my native land.

However, this has been difficult. The Indian sensibility stands in the way, this area of the Indian mind where space and time, sound and silence, motion linear and cyclic, word and symbol, become one — and one is unable to distinguish among them. Or perhaps the Indian sensibility has turned its antennae toward the unknown, this *beyond*; and the resulting poetry loses its concreteness, moving the reader in a realm where clarity gets lost, the verse dependent on suggestions of meaning. Perhaps this vagueness puts the Western reader off. I have found that many of the poems I send out to foreign magazines come back with editorial comments that the poems tend toward the philosophic.

The Indian poet writing in English shares this identity of Indianness with his contemporaries in the Indian languages. At the

same time, he is alienated from them by the fact that he uses an alien tongue. I will not go into the factors for and against the use of English for poetry. But this much is certain: he *is* alienated from his contemporaries, and he speaks for himself alone, from that region in the country, which has contributed to his personality. So the Indian English poet “borrows” the tradition and myths of the regional literature for his own English-language poetry. This is indeed a strange situation in which the poet finds himself.

Much of the poetry that appears today is marked by a thinness of feeling, without a sense of the tragic that is there in almost all fine poetry. It is as though the practising Indian English poet doesn't believe in what he expresses, making the poem a kind of plain verbal exercise. And yet there are publishers in India who seem to be taking risks with poetry, new names are seen in the lists, which come out from time to time. India is plagued by issues like hunger, sexuality and violence today; and yet very few poets talk about these things, falling back again and again into their own private selves. It is time, one feels that more poets tackled such themes, writing about their involvement with socio-political issues. Perhaps our poets are wary of despair: and we *need* feelings like despair to trap us inside our own selves. Far from such despair sometimes a cry is heard:

Calcutta...

they will pull you down from Ochterlony  
monument and torture broken ribs beneath  
your upthrust breasts and they will tear the anguish  
from your sullen eyes and thrust the bayonet  
between your thighs...

Prithish Nandy may not have written well-crafted poetry in the above lines, but they are words of anguish, his own. One likes to ask oneself: What exactly is the relevance of our poetry to a society, which has as its basic problem hunger? One doesn't know what to say or do. With the sense of fatalism one has inherited

from one's ancestors, one goes on, aware of how it has moulded one's sensibility. It is a pattern different from the Western. Yet at the core of all good poetry is the enlargement of our awareness of life, when good poetry acts as *mantra*, irrespective of whether one looks at it through Western or Indian eyes.

Much of the poetry that appears today is marked by a thinness of feeling, without a sense of the tragic that is there in almost all fine poetry. It is as though the practising Indian English poet doesn't believe in what he expresses, making the poem a kind of plain verbal exercise. And yet critics and publishers in India who seem to be taking risks with poetry now, names are seen in lists which come out from time to time, Indian, played by poets like hunger, sexuality and violence today, and yet very few poets talk about these things, falling back again and again into their own private solace. It is time, one feels, that more poets tackled such themes, writing about their involvement with socio-political issues. Perhaps our poets are wary of despair, and we need feelings like despair to trap us inside our own selves. Far from such despair, in the way that some times a cry is heard, and the seeds of new thought, sound and silence, motion and cyclic, worriment and calm, Or, as they will pull you down from Criticism you — one seemed to perhaps and nature breaks its disciplines, and the the its as you, perhaps priests and they will see the anguished unknown tool from your sudden eyes and in the the beyond, essential, this between your things, a notion dependent on the dependent on the vagueness put the Western reader off. I have found that many of years, English may not have written well-crafted poetry in language that each poet, however good, is to use. I think the above lines, but they are words of anguish, his own. One likes to ask oneself what exactly is the elevation of our poetry, what to say or do with the sense of feeling.

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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.

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

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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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