

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 Rynjab

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.

NEHU Publications reserves the copyright to all articles, communications and book reviews published and no article/communication/review or a part thereof may be reprinted without written permission from the Editor.

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 Publications" 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

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

- The Beginning of Mantra : Indian
English Poetry Today 1
JAYANTA MAHAPATRA
- Gary Snyder, the Poet-sage of
Wilderness Values 11
SARANGADHAR BARAL
- Nongkrem Dance, Most Ancient and
Renowned of Khasi Festivals 23
NIGEL JENKINS
- Metamorphosis of Monsters, *Dayans* and
Djinns (The Bizarre and Fantastic in *Midnight's*
Children) 33
NANDINI BHATTACHARYA
- My Writing, My Times 49
ROBIN S. NGANGOM
- U Manik Raitong, Icon of Love and
Creativity : An Appraisal 55
ESTHER SYIEM
- STORIES FROM THE NORTHEAST**
- Civility is all that Counts 73
S. J. DUNCAN
- Gangacharan's *Chompren* 82
DEBABRATA DEB

Innocence Wears Another Look	91
<i>VANNEIHTLUANGA</i>	
The Holy Dip	97
<i>ANIMA DUTTA</i>	
One Night	106
<i>KEISHAM PRIYOKUMAR</i>	
Windsong in March	112
<i>EASTERINE IRALU</i>	
POEMS BY NEHU POETS	119
BOOK REVIEW	143

*Stories
from the
Northeast*

These stories are part of a volume edited by Prof. K. C. Baral, Director, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Northeast Campus, Shillong. The copyright of these stories remains exclusively with the editor and the individual copyright holders. These are published in *The NEHU Journal* for a wider circulation.

Civility is all that Counts

S. J. DUNCAN

S.J. Duncan (1897-1984) was a civil servant and retired as the Chairman of Assam Public Service Commission. A gifted short story writer, poet, dramatist and translator, he has many volumes to his credit. The present story is taken from his most popular collection **Phuit! Ka Sabuit!** and is translated by **Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih**.

I tendered my jeep for sale. A man came to negotiate. "Where are you from, who are you?" I asked, for in business transactions one should ask such questions. "Me Haripod", he replied, "you sell cars?" He asked. "Yes", I said. "Man, look at the car", he said. "Okay", I said. After he had had a good look, he said, "Me go try"; "no try, no telling good or bad". "Okay", I said, for in these matters you should indicate that you have absolute trust in your customer. "Me very soon come back", he added. "All right", I agreed. Roar-r-r, the jeep rumbled. He was gone in a moment. All I could see was a dense cloud of black smoke. But his 'very soon' really took a long time. Father of Bor, I told myself, you must not be too gullible. But at that very moment the jeep returned, purr-r-r-stopped. "No good", he said, he won't buy. "All right", I said. That was that.

The next morning when I went to clean the jeep (for I used to wash and scrub, groom and preen everyday so it could fetch an extra value), I discovered the rear wheels were not mine. Mine were bought only a short while ago, but these were quite worn and completely treadless. Hey, I started, that rascal has cheated me. Now I see, it is decidedly unsafe to let a stranger

go for a trial all by himself. But where and how will I find that son of a thief again. Father of Bor, I counselled myself, from now on you must clutch your ear tightly, you must beware. I reached for my left ear, from now on never will I be swindled again, I vowed.

Three days after that another man came. He too wanted to buy the jeep. I felt my left ear. I held it firmly. "Who are you, where are you from?" I asked. You must quiz them like this every time, otherwise you'll end up in the soup. "I'm Holira", he answered, I live at Nongthymmai. O, a neighbour, I told myself. After inspecting the jeep for sometime he said he wanted to go for a test-run. Father of Bor, I berated myself, remember. I twisted my left ear till it hurt. I remembered Haripod. So you wish to try it out, I asked, come we'll go together. In selling and buying you should sweat it out a little, otherwise you won't make much of a profit. As soon as we were in the jeep, he was in such a tearing hurry, he acted as if he was missing his boat. My God, how he zoomed. Even I who had been driving for years was so thoroughly disoriented that I simply could not comprehend if I were sitting in a jeep or flying in a jet. I felt as if all my entrails were trying to leap out of my stomach. With one hand I grabbed my belly for fear my guts would take off, and with the other I hung on to the jeep for dear life. Fortunately, we soon arrived at the bus station or else I was sure my entrails would have been hopelessly entangled. But this hurricane, I mean this Holira, seemed quite unperturbed. He got down quickly and said, please wait a moment, I'll just go here for a while. It was at that very time that the buses prepared to leave for Gauhati. I waited for 15 minutes, he did not come. A neighbour from Nongthymmai is harmless, I comforted myself, for at that moment, quite by chance, I happened to twist my left ear. I waited for half an hour but still he did not come. The man speaks Khasi like a Khasi, he must be harmless. I'm sure he is absolutely straight, I comforted myself some more time because I was beginning to worry. The Gauhati-bound buses were departing one by one; it had been a whole hour since he left. What is taking him so long, I questioned myself, ahem,

where has he vanished?

I went to look for him in the station's compound. There was no one except a *daju*¹ or two. This will not do. In selling and buying you must sweat it out, do a little hard work, otherwise you simply won't be able to keep your business going. I went to the station's office itself. I scanned everywhere. I looked high and low. For whom are you searching, enquired one of the clerks. I'm looking for Holira, *Babu*. He told me he would come in here for a bit, but he hasn't turned up, though it has been more than an hour since he left. Oh, you are looking for Holira, he said, that fellow has left for Gauhati by one of the buses for quite sometime now. I nearly fell flat on my back with the shock, but I braced my legs as best I could and told myself sternly, Father of Bor, don't be a fool, preserve your dignity. In selling and buying you should not expose yourself as an idiot, otherwise you'll be swindled right and left. But why is all this happening to me? A man like me and I am still conned by those two impostors. Father of Bor, I said, from now on you must start clutching both your ears. The left hand, because it was used to the practice, went straightaway to the left ear. But the right hand, because it was not experienced, tried to pull at my nose. It was only when I grimaced with pain that it let go, that it grasped the right ear.

One day a roly-poly sort of man, with a belly bulging like a large cooking pot came to my house. Where to ... I nearly said potbelly, but I remembered in the nick of time that in buying and selling one should never be rude to anyone. So I coughed instead and asked him, "who was he, where was he from, why was he here?" "You not know me, me know you", he said. Me Dadakhwandew, you not know me, he queried. O, yes, I answered for the heck of it, otherwise how am I supposed to know of any *Khakhwan* (fish of river *Khwan*) or *Khabyrni* (fish of river *Byrni*). "You sell car", he asked. At the question both my hands clutched their respective ears. Why, you deaf, he asked, as he saw me holding fast to my ears. He thought I was deaf, but he was quite unaware of the profound motive behind my ear twisting. Yes I would like to

sell my jeep, I said, and I'm not deaf, I added. Then in a louder voice I asked, "do you want to try it out (the image of Haripod was staring at me with small beady eyes), or do you want to go for a test-run (the memory of that gut-jerking hurricane was still fresh in my mind)?" You must always be on your guard with grafters like these. The hands were still clasping their respective ears even now. No, he said, me look at car, me know everything. The right hand relaxed and dismounted from the right ear.

He examined the jeep. "How much price you say?" he enquired. Three thousand, I replied, and waxed my moustache as if to imply that I too was perfectly used to talking in terms of thousands. When it noticed the right hand waxing my moustache, the left hand too came down from the left ear and delved into my shirt pocket for a Navy cut. But as I was holding the cigarette, in the act of putting it to my mouth, he suddenly gave vent to a loud expression of utter disgust: phooey, what is this. I was so shocked I dropped my cigarette. Three thousand for this car, he bawled, and stared at me as if he would eat me up. Me know this car very old. Me give eight hundred, he said, reaching with his right hand into his pocket as if to take out the money, while with his left he picked up my cigarette from the ground. His right hand came out from his pocket and pretended to feel for a matchbox. Why you speak so, he said, lighting the cigarette. No, no, *mahajon*,² I won't give, I repeated, also shaking my head once. Take nine hundred, he urged. His right hand was already feeling for his wallet. No, I won't take, I said, shaking my head more forcefully. One month you run, this car break down, he said, take one thousand, he coaxed. And this time his right hand was really going for his wallet. No, I said quickly and shook my head so vigorously that I nearly crashed. You no have idea about car, he stated. Look this *ispring* broken in a week, me know about car, he went on, inside engine gone bad, piston must change, *carbetar* also must change, *kalatch* also gone bad, *birake* also not working, me give one thousand one hundred, he concluded. No, I said. And this time I did not shake my head, I

stared instead at his face. Maybe this potbelly is a nutcase, maybe he is just pretending to know everything about my jeep. I never knew, no, I never dreamt that my jeep would be so derelict, so worthless. Listen me tell you, he said again, *diphrenshal* gear also no good, costing lot of money, new bearing also not getting now, you take one thousand five hundred, he said, at the same time taking out a bunch of bank notes. Now I was really furious. But on the other hand, maybe some crooks had raided the garage at night and swapped the parts, I thought, let me go and see for myself. I opened the bonnet. I looked around. Everything was fine. I stepped on the brake and checked every other part. But there was nothing wrong anywhere, all was as it should be. My anger flared up like a sudden blaze since he had denounced and discredited my jeep so out of hand. I was thinking of giving him a befitting dressing down and heaping curses that he wouldn't forget for the rest of his life, but when I approached, there he was, huge and fleshy like a calf elephant and it seemed to me that even a dynamite would have trouble moving him. Father of Bor, I counselled myself once again, be careful. And as I said that, both my hands grabbed their ears straightaway. Even the right hand did not make the same nose-yanking error again. But this business with this potbelly is no Holira-Haripod encounter. This must be tackled in an entirely different manner. How do I confront this potbelly. While deep in these profound reflections (for in selling and buying you should mull things over carefully, otherwise you'll end up in the woods, in deep trouble), I heard him say again, okay, okay, take this two thousand, and so saying he produced another wad of bank notes. That blazing anger was racing to my head again, but before I could counsel myself, I blurted out, *mahajon*, I said, when my jeep has become lame, deaf and blind, when it has broken all the bones in its body and when it has been reduced to a pile of scrap iron, then is the time you should come for it. And bring that two thousand and I will sell the jeep to no one else but you. I hurled all that at him, sweating all the while, lest he should reach out for me and wring my neck. But to my great relief, he left without making too much of a fuss about it.

I entered the house. Mother of Bor, I confided, since I have been holding both my ears I have become much wiser, but when hagglers like that potbelly turn up what will I do to keep my anger from going to my head. Bite the tip of your tongue, she replied. Mother of Bor never said more than was necessary. Oh yes, of course, why did I forget to bite the tip of my tongue. A little later mother of Bor said, father of Bor, if left to you that jeep will stay there till it gives birth to a child. I laughed aloud, ha-ha-ha. Don't laugh like a nitwit, she chided. Mother of Bor is given to jesting like this. Father of Bor, she told me, if any other customer shows up, call me. Mother of Bor is pragmatic, she thinks of everything. She never wants to put anyone to any trouble. She had seen how hard I had tried to sell the jeep. She must be feeling sorry for me.

For a while there was not a jeep buyer to be seen. But one morning, as I was washing and scrubbing, grooming and preening the jeep in the garage, I heard someone coughing from behind. I turned to look. Who are you, where are you from, are you coming to buy the jeep, I fired my questions at him. My hands were about to twist their ears, the tip of my tongue was already out, ready to be bitten. I'm here because I heard you have offered your jeep for sale. My name's Horshon, you don't remember me, he asked. Both my hands clutched their ears tightly. I bit the tip of my tongue but had to let go very quickly because of pain and because I had to answer Horshon. Oh yes, I agreed, I have offered the jeep for sale (the left hand gave the left ear a hard pinch). You want to go for a test-run, I asked (the right hand too gave a hard pinch). Let us go together. I want five thousand for the jeep, I declared, but you, how much will you offer, five hundred, I asked, giving the tip of my tongue another bite for I suddenly remembered that potbelly. Horshon stared at me, stupefied. It seemed that my outbursts had really offended his feelings. In selling and buying, if you are doubtful of the man, you should hit him where it hurts. They thought I was an idiot that they could trick me into selling the jeep for peanuts. What do you think, I queried, as I removed the right hand from the ear and let it wax my moustache to show that I was not someone

with whom he could fool around. I came to take a look at your car and to buy it if the price is right, he said, but since you have treated me so uncivilly, and stuck out your tongue at me, I have no other choice but to leave, I did not come here to steal, he retorted. No, no, I said hurriedly, please don't be offended, and here I bit the tip of my tongue once again for I could see that he was really upset. I haven't seen a man anywhere, he said, who would stick out his tongue at his own customers so frequently and who would abuse them as you do, even before they have started bargaining. I too have my own business. I too have my own investment. Between businessmen he said, we first look the commodity over and then talk of the price. I don't know what you think I am, he went on, and on and on. I started biting the tip of my tongue more frequently, hoping it would help me out of this vexed situation, but it bled instead. His words stabbed at my heart with red-hot iron rods. But just when I was about to dive underneath the jeep and pretend to examine the differential gear, Mother of Bor arrived at the scene.

Oh, it's *Bah*³ Horshon, I didn't know you were here, she said. And right away they struck up an intimate conversation as if they were long-time friends. I left them together and crept backwards out of sight for the sweat was flowing from my body as water from a bamboo tube. Phooey, I said to myself, what made me so crazy as to speak like that to *Bah* Horshon. I went inside the house, not to hide myself in shame as you might suppose, but to have a sip of water. Father of Bor, I said, cool yourself. But I kept seeing visions of Haripod, Holira and Dadakhwandew. It was those churlish, hoggish swindlers who had made me so suspicious and ill-humoured that I could not even be civil to *Bah* Horshon.

A little later I heard the jeep rumbled to life in the garage. I peeped from a window. There he was, *Bah* Horshon, bending, inspecting the engine. He looked up, looked down and walked round the jeep, no doubt giving the tyres a once-over. Then I saw him sitting close to the jeep with mother of Bor by his side. Hey, what was he doing. I goggled at them. I saw him fish out some money,

count the notes and hand out some to mother of Bor, who accepted them without a murmur. Earlier, as he was counting, I too counted along with him from the window. I counted as far as two bundles of ten rupee notes, but after that I lost my opportunity for mother of Bor was staring towards me and I had to drop out of sight very quickly.

I waited inside the house. I heard them discussing something and then mother of Bor was calling out to me. Father of Bor, she shouted. Yes, I replied eagerly. Why don't you come on out, *Bah Hor* is just leaving. I came out of the house almost running. I kept my eyes fixed on the ground lest I should trip (but you know what, later people scoffed at me, saying I did that because I couldn't look *Bah Horshon* straight in the eye). Good bye *Um*,⁴ he said, I'm going. But I did not reply for I was still biting the tip of my tongue. Mind your manners, father of Bor, I warned myself. Why aren't you saying something, Mother of Bor demanded, staring at me. I let go of my tongue, oh, sorry *Um*, I said. I'm leaving for Mawsynram today, he told me, I don't think these rear wheels would give me any problem, would they *Um*, he asked. All of a sudden I remembered Haripod. Son of a thief, I said at full volume, because I was still smouldering with pent-up fury. Father of Bor, take it easy, why did you address *Bah Hor* in such a manner, mother of Bor chided me. Uh, sorry *Um*, I apologized quickly, these tyres are actually quite new (I started explaining), but, son of a thief... Father of Bor, what are you saying, interrupted mother of Bor, why are you making these wild accusations at *Bah Hor*. I'm very sorry *Um*, a thousand apologies, I said, trying to appease him and explaining that I did not refer to him, but inside I was still fuming at the thought of those scoundrels. I opened my mouth to say something more but mother of Bor came quickly to my side and waving the bundles of money at me, she said, here, take this three thousand, *Bah Hor* has already paid for the jeep. The pupils of my eyes dilated as I ogled at the money. Three thousand, I repeated, excited and incredulous. But son of a thief, I exclaimed, no, no, I didn't mean you *Um* (I

clarified hastily), I was only referring to that rogue....

Veroom-m-m, the jeep roared at that moment. Okay *Kong*,⁵ I'm leaving, he thanked mother of Bor, driving away before I could clear up the cause of my seething rage. When the jeep was out of the courtyard, he stole a look at me. Good bye *Um*, he said, and then he was gone.

As soon as he was out of sight I asked mother of Bor what she had done to strike such a quick bargain and that too at three thousand rupees. What would I do, she replied. *Bah Hor* inspected the jeep. More than three thousand I cannot manage, he said. And I too did not haggle. I said, *Bah Hor*, when you have inspected the jeep and when you are prepared to pay that much, it's all right with me. That was all. We did not really talk about it.

Father of Bor, she said, when she saw me still holding on to the three thousand as if I were in a daze, in selling and buying civility is all that counts, it pays its own price. She stretched out her hand and gently eased out the three thousand from my hand. When you take anything out of a person's hand, you must do so graciously, mother of Bor used to say.

Civility is all that counts, I told myself and let out a deep breath when I saw that three thousand resting snugly in mother of Bor's hand.

1. *Coolie*. 2. *Merchant*. 3. *Khasi* for mister. 4. *Brother-in-law*. Here it is used as an endearing term. 5. *Khasi* for madam.

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 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.

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.