



S P A C E S

SCM 1999-2000

Will you let me write
Or must it be in perfect
Rhyme
Could I write in thought
Or must I conform to reason
Ought I to write of themes
Or can I
Be impassioned about
Aberrations
Perhaps
Articulate myself
In the language of
The stammerer
What if my subjects
Were bald men
Suffering incontinence
Or must I poesy
On the beautiful and the
Trauma of acne
Will you let me write in
Free speech
Sans punctuation
Or must I conform to
Weighty words
And pause where expected
Will you condemn
My priorities
Label them inconsequential
And just not on
Will you let me write
or not

— *Mythri Surendra*

EDITORIAL

Every once in a while it becomes imperative that we take a step back, to review dispassionately what we have built around us over many years in terms of physical, political, social and metaphysical spaces. We have tried to take that step.

In an age marked by the indiscriminate use of censorship and the prevalence of hidden agendas it seems evident that the political has achieved an unhealthy paramouncy. This political agenda arises from cultural spaces (where it is seldom about culture), and is determined by economic forces.

The English Historian E P Thompson once wrote of India that, "All the convergent influences of this world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular, Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic, socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind."

In a nation driven by a melange of such ideologies it is apparent that people build spaces around themselves in order to fortify themselves: spaces that include and spaces that exclude. This could be an act of defence or one of reinforcement of the self. Our decisions while defining these spaces for ourselves or trying to fit into those already defined are either conscious or unconscious. We may not always have the privilege to choose as the pressure to conform is surmounting.

One would logically assume that in a democracy like ours, the larger number would occupy a larger space in the physical sense. Ironically, however, the privileged few not only occupy and own most of the available space but also set the norms and ways of seeing that operate within it.

The marginalisation of people who do not fit into the norms that society has dictated has drawn much attention over centuries. Questions of morality and ethics have revolved around some core issues - who gets left out, who oppresses whom, what is the norm, who is normal, etc.

*This is our effort to examine, explore and question spaces. It seems to us that whatever consumerism finds uncomfortable or unpleasant is marginalised. Regional languages with little or no appeal in the global politico-economy find no takers today. Eunuchs are unsettling, the handicapped make us feel uncomfortable and dwarfs remind us of nature's 'imperfections' so we choose not to think about them. People are locked up in jails because they are destitute, animals are tortured for we must wear *shahtoosh* underwear and women may be raped by their spouses because the Indian Penal Code does not believe that a married woman can refuse her husband the right to sex. The system has changed only marginally since Independence. Governments have changed but ideological structures have not. So the Dalits are ghettoised and the Tibetans in India have no identity.*

This is our attempt to examine and interrogate the antiquated systems that encourage the existence of hierarchies and urge for the conception of an alternative paradigm.

— The Editors



Editors

Anshika Misra
Durga Raghunath

Editorial Team

Rahela Padachira (co-ordinator)

Megha Bahree
Puja Birla
Sonal Makhija
Sonu Munshi



Design & Production

Janani Ravichandran
(co-ordinator)

Ankita Arora
Sahana Chowdhary
Mukta Dhond
Arpita Modi
Harini Rajagopal
Richa Sharan
Monica Singh
Mythri Surendra

Advertising & Marketing

Haridini Hirlekar (co-ordinator)

Nisha Alex
Ankita Arora
Avantika Meattle
Bhavna Menon
Radhika Menon
Rigvedita Nigam
Durga Raghunath
Komal Shah



Cover Photographs : (Clockwise, top left) Arpita Modi, Mukta Dhond, Richa Sharan.

Page Border Design : Janani Ravichandran

Contents

Mera joota hai japaani, yeh bhaasha inglistaani	Puja Birla	4
"Like a Kite whose string has been cut..."	Supriya Correa	6
"We don't want to inspire anyone. Just lead ordinary lives"	Durga Raghunath	9
Eunique Recoveries	Anshika Misra	11
The Dalit Woman Writes Back	Kanchan A Mirchandani	15
Left Out	Susan George	19
"My underwear was in focus, not my shot"	Durga Raghunath & Sonu Munshi	21
What Happened To The Women?	Megha Bahree	23
At The Bus Stop	Rati Sud	25
Why a married woman can't say "NO"	Sonal Makhija	27
Broken	Tamanna Ahuja	29
The Empire Writes Back	Saumya Roy	30
Not Sleepy, Grumpy and Sneezzy. Just Ram, Mushtaq and Shivaji	Leandre D'souza	32
Go Straight To Jail	Rajyasree Sen	34
'For the Good of Mankind'	Richa Sharan	37

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank **P. Sainath**, **Smruti Koppikar**, **Anupamaa Joshi** and **Jeroo F. Mulla** for their support and encouragement. We would specially like to thank **Jerry Pinto** for his 'valuable' inputs, infectious energy and unending patience. Also **Mr. Bhada** and **the staff of Jenaz Printers**.

Spaces was produced by the students of Social Communications Media at Sophia Shree B. K. Somani Polytechnic.

Printers : **Jenaz Printers** ☎ 261 2853



लहरा जोता है जपानी, ये बहशा इंग्लिशानी

PUJA BIRLA tries to understand the processes that have made Hindi a second language in its own home.

Scene 1: A political rally, 1992.

"... Hindi is the most important language of our country. It is our national language, the link between the east and the west, the north and the south. Hindi binds a multilingual country like India...."

Scene 2: An interview process, 1993.

"... But if you do not have even a working knowledge of English it will be very difficult for you to handle this job. We are not asking for anything fancy, just how to answer phone calls, queries in English. I'm really sorry but we cannot help you...."

It is a strange paradox that while Hindi is touted as the language of the people, an important section of the population refuses to see it as an asset, as something that can value-add to a young person's 'Curriculum Vitae'. This section is the decision-making part of the corporate world, the section that

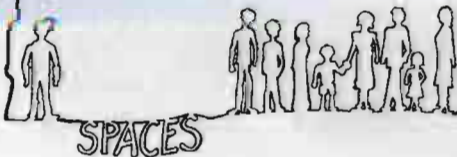
decides who will be recruited, who will get a running start in the rat race. These are people who have power over the lives of those who use Hindi as their medium of communication. However, Hindi has become passé.

Economic imperatives have forced people to abandon Hindi in favour of at least a "working knowledge of English," so that they get the jobs they need and desire. Business transactions, bureaucratic decisions, formal communications, all take place in English. In the twilight zone of a post-colonial hangover, we automatically assume that to speak in English means to think intelligently. Hindi might be the language of popular culture but it is English that inspires confidence. In general, Hindi stunts one's professional growth.

R.K. Pandey, Head of the Hindi Department at Bombay University, feels differently. "No other language can offer you the

kind of scope that Hindi does, not even English. People can go into teaching, journalism, the banking sector or translate other languages including English into Hindi or vice versa. Those who have a degree or proficiency in Hindi are in demand and are preferred over those who know only English."

"Not quite," says Dr. Manjula Desai, Head of the Hindi Department at KC College. "The number of students graduating in Hindi has gone down drastically over the years. We seem to believe that only English speaking people are smart and articulate. This may seem harmless in a social situation but it becomes a dreadful prejudice when you're looking for a job. Interviewers are impressed by what language is being used, how something is being said rather than what is being said. And so the student is forced to do some extra course in English if he or she has graduated in Hindi."

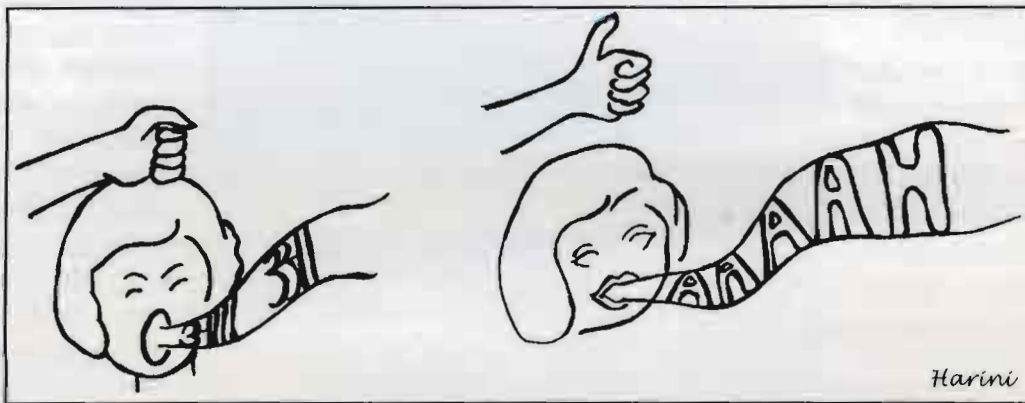


"Everyone will follow the dictates of economic needs," says Sharad Bhowmick, Head of the Sociology Department at Mumbai University. "It is up to the Government to evolve and enforce a policy with respect to Hindi. But the government's dual

contention between various state governments and the Centre.

"The government is more harmful than helpful," says Dr. Desai. "It keeps saying that it wants to increase the use of Hindi as far as trade, business and

Hindi courses, "the highest of any language department," students claim that it is easier to score in Hindi and they take up the language as a subject to boost their overall scores. So much for the language most in demand!



formula has most people confused."

The Constitution of India gave the state governments a grace period of 15 years to replace English with Hindi as the official language. That expired in 1965 with hardly any progress. Because of the hue and cry raised by various state governments, the Centre decided to give another 15 year time period that has been continuously extended. Under the present situation, the students in a non-Hindi speaking state are expected to learn at least three languages: English, Hindi and the regional language. This mandate is not necessary in the Hindi belt and has become the bone of

communications are concerned. But at the same time it has established a minimum number of students who must enroll for there to be a Hindi faculty. If 15 or more students have not been enrolled in the First Year, the college cannot offer Hindi as an ancillary subject." The Government follows this practice to cut costs. Less than the required number of students mean that the department will be closed. This is what is happening all over the country.

Incidentally, the UPSC entrances that can be answered in Hindi have very few takers, even from the Hindi belt. While Pandey claims that he has 400 students enrolled in post-graduate

Hindi may slowly be infiltrating the South and the North-East but its claims to being the universal language of India have not been fulfilled. While some are desperately trying to believe the illusion, others have changed their priorities to suit reality. While the directive of the Constitution remains buried in bureaucratic jargon, English remains the language of the powerful and a symbol of upward social mobility; a language that has become synonymous with material success and culture consciousness. And everyone wants a share of this pie. The language of the oppressor is what the once-oppressed want. □



"LIKE A KITE WHOSE STRING HAS BEEN CUT..."

The Tibetan in India. The Indian Tibetan? The Tibetan Indian? The Tibetan in Exile? SUPRIYA CORREA finds an identity crisis among the thousands of stateless persons who have found refuge in India

*Thirty-nine years in exile.
Yet no nation supports us.
Not a single bloody nation.....
.....I am Tibetan.
But I am not from Tibet.
Never been there.
Yet I dream of dying there.*

Tenzin Tsundue

(Excerpt from a poem 'My Tibetanness', from *Crossing the Border*)

In the house of the Tsundue family, Kollegal, Karnataka, the monsoon rain water sometimes seeps through the roof. Utensils and make-shift buckets are placed under the leaks to collect the water. For the past 25 years of their stay there, the Tsundues have consistently repaired the house but never re-structured it. "Why bother renovating it?" Mrs Tsundue asks. "This is only a temporary dwelling. We will go home soon."

Home is Tibet. Now occupied territory. Officially known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) according to China. With the escape of the Karmapa Lama to India, the ignored detritus of

the Tibetan issue resurface. Whether or not their fate is being discussed, the Tibetans in India continue their present occupation as they have for the past 40 years. Which means that Pema, Pasang, Dharmo, Tolang and a host of other vendors sit on the footpaths of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, selling woollens during the months of winter. "I was born in India," says 24-year-old Pema, and pointing to 64-year-old Dharmo continues, "But he fled Tibet with his family when he was just 14."

"When I was young, I wanted to be a scholar," reminisces Dharmo. But it was not to be. The 1950's shattered the dreams of a million people. In 1949, China invaded Tibet, an act amounting to gross violation of human rights and suppression of freedom. The invasion took place under the pretext of developing infrastructure. Says Dharmo, "Realising a barbed wire was being tightened around us, there was rebellion in several pockets which was brutally suppressed by the Chinese. In 1951, China forced a Tibetan delegation to

sign an agreement, the terms of which were considered unacceptable to us." The 1954 Pansheel agreement had India and China unfairly deciding the fate of a third nation Tibet without its involvement and consent. In 1959, fearing a threat to his life, The Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political head of Tibet, fled to India. Thereafter, the exodus began.

Since India is not a party to the United Nation Convention relating to the status of refugees, it cannot grant refugee status to the Tibetans. "We are given a "stateless" status. We have to be interviewed at the Tibetan Refugee Center at Dharamsala, which monitors the flow of Tibetans in exile. They ascertain that we are fleeing persecution and not here for espionage. Our certificates of living in India are temporary and have to be renewed every year," says Tolang.

But why settle for a status of statelessness rather than live in their own country? In the years of the uprising, 1.2 million people died from the Tibetan population



of 6 million. 6,250 monasteries were desecrated and the act of possessing a Tibetan flag or venerating a picture of The Dalai Lama could land a person in jail. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala,

"Torture in detainment was accompanied by extreme physical abuse. The victims would be severely beaten with electric batons, handcuffed with arms around hot chimneys and hung from ceilings with fires burning underneath. Nuns suffered sexual abuse and even pregnant women were not spared." The Chinese government used coercive methods of birth control. China has gone so far as to drive most of the Tibetan folk from their land and allow Chinese to settle in Tibet resulting in a population transfer. However, the barbaric treatment was endured with the fervent chant, "Kill us, but do not kill our Dalai Lama".

The Dalai Lama having escaped from Tibet has been given asylum in Dharamsala. He has formed a Tibetan Government in Exile (TGE). The Indian government has leased land to the Tibetans and the Department of

Home looks after the land. Each adult was allotted one acre of land and gradually a settlement developed providing other employment opportunities like agro -industries, making handicrafts and carpet weaving.



Settled. Yet, not comfortable

But the available opportunities are limited. The prime factor is the influx of 3000-plus Tibetans entering India every year that puts further pressure on the

settlements. The land has not increased in proportion to the settlers; it has dwindled to half-an-acre per adult. As a result, many people leave looking for lucrative jobs. It is indeed more difficult rehabilitating second and third generation Tibetans.

Recently many have taken to selling sweaters in the metros. Pema laments, "Unfortunately, this activity takes the able-bodied away from the farms; it also separates families. The cities do not offer decent housing and if the cold is not severe, few buyers means meagre profits." In general, they are ghettoised to primary sector activities and not many engage in secondary and tertiary activities. Therefore, their unemployment rates remain high and the standard of living low.

As for the education of children, there are Centre Schools for Tibetans and Tibetan Children's Villages. Yet higher education is a problem. Those wishing to enter legal, medical and other such fields have to depend on sponsorship. In spite of these difficulties some students do manage to brave the odds and pursue the subject of their choice. Tenzin Tsundue, a 24- year old



student not only has an MA in English to his name but is also reading his Masters in Philosophy. He has written and published a collection of his own poems (*Crossing the Border*) and zealously participates in pro-Tibet activities on the issue of statelessness. He muses, "How do I describe what it means to be stateless? It's like being a kite whose string has been cut. The kite floats, not knowing where it will fall."

Still the fiercely proud Tibetans do not avail of Indian citizenship despite the fact that most of them are born on Indian soil. The reason is clear, if they do then they can no longer stake their claim for independence of Tibet. "Not being a citizen of any country is a precarious situation to be in," claims Tenzin. Being stateless is like belonging nowhere. Yet at the same time there is a beautiful sentiment of belonging to a nation we have never visited, a nation for whose freedom we yearn." He writes,

"We are refugees here. People of a lost country.
Citizen to no nation"

He is right. Not a single nation recognizes Tibet as an independent nation state. India recognizes Tibetans as "people registered to be living in India". To be recognized as a refugee involves protecting them from strife in their own country -- but Tibet is not considered a country.

As long as the Tibetan government does not exist and until the Indian government takes a definite political stand, it will be very difficult for Tibetans to live.

Though they claim to enjoy the tolerance meted by the Indian community, the present asylum that they avail of on Indian soil is superficial when faced with the ultimate insecurity of a stateless people. Where would they go if the Indian government decides to withdraw the annual ritual of registration and issuing the certificates to them? They remain thus, a community once on the

'roof of the world' now with neither the citizenship of one country nor the soil of another.

Pema relates an anecdote: "Initially when the Tibetans arrived in India, they grew papayas because the plant bore fruit quickly. They rarely grew coconuts. Because they felt that they would be home before the palms bore fruit.

Now they have started growing mangoes and guavas. Coconuts too.

*"Never been there.
Yet I dream of dying there." □*



"WE DON'T WANT TO INSPIRE ANYONE. JUST LEAD ORDINARY LIVES"

The differently abled have a plea. But will society oblige?
Asks DURGA RAGHUNATH

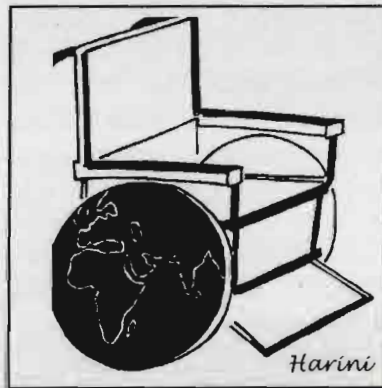
Hema walks out slowly, leans on the banister by the steps. She watches, as all the equipment is set up yet again. Someone calls out her name, she ignores the call, but the caller is persistent. She gets up and drags herself in front of the screen. The lights come on. It's show time.

The poster child is a surefire tug at our hearts. The children picked to represent charity fund-raising drives must be seen as brave, determined and inspirational. They are token children, unaware of the issues, unsure of what they are doing when they are photographed, their participation limited to their ability to convey a saleable image of the differently abled.

Hema has appeared thrice in such posters. "They tell me I'm doing a very honourable thing. Why don't they do it then?" she asks. Anthony Diaz, a differently-abled person confined to a wheelchair says, "Pity is oppressive. The differently abled are trying to lead normal lives, not inspire anyone."

This group is a minority that you might join tomorrow. Cerebral palsy, Parkinson's

disease, polio or some spinal injury, are just a few of the possible causes. Unconscious of this reality the differently abled are seldom factored into our social calculus. Diaz wants to cast his vote but he has to be lifted by



four friends or carried in an ambulance to the polling booth to achieve this. Hema could never go to a theatre, restaurant or a beauty parlour as those who have the use of their limbs can. "I have never entered a restaurant without attracting clumsy attempts at help that humiliate me thoroughly," says Gita Vishwanathan, 45, afflicted with cerebral palsy at birth.

Crucial to this condition is the wheelchair. Having imported western ideologies and

mannerisms, we have a gamut of small cars, large cars and two wheelers, but no such choice among wheelchairs. Extraordinary, for some spend a fair bit of their lives in it.

Jagdeep Desai, architect, designer and editor for the Newsletter of the Indian Institute of Architects says, "There is only one universal design whatever the make, whatever the demands. A foldable body and footrests that open out are the sole conveniences. Even cushioned backrests or gears haven't made an appearance." Badly constructed and clumsily aligned they are among the fundamental barriers to any independence.

Four-and-a-half years ago, the Narasimha Rao Government succeeded in passing the Disabilities Act. This Act declares that all buildings must be rendered user-friendly for the differently-abled. The onus is now on the architects to work towards what is known as a 'barrier-free environment'. Jagdeep Desai elaborates, "The aim of the barrier-free environment is to allow easy access to the differently abled, to



enter libraries, museums etc on their own. Ramps, railings along walls and large bathrooms for easy maneuverability are top priority. Levels too are very important. Wash basins, western closets and mirrors -- all at the right levels." In Mumbai, even if Dadar railway station or Santacruz airport could boast of a ramp, it is more by accident than design, for they were constructed for luggage trolleys not wheelchairs. Further, trains offer a miniscule coach meant for the handicapped into which a wheelchair once heaved in will not be able to move an inch.

"The differently-able still remain enshrined in the ideologies of segregation, labelled and categorised according to their medical condition," says Mithu Alur, of The Spastics Society of India. 'If they don't look like us they don't feel like us', is a common misconception. Differently-abled children and adults from supposedly liberal homes explain that they are constantly faced with the humiliation of asking for money, for if they have no 'earning power' they have no 'spending power'. Gita Vishwanathan says, "I can never buy presents or clothes when I feel like it. My mother and sisters look at me crossly when I ask for an extra pair of anything. They say I don't need them, my old ones are intact."

In the Indian context the Persons With Disabilities (PWD)

Act- 1995 assures equal opportunity for the differently-abled in education, employment, recreation and social security. Anthony Diaz who has a degree in commerce has a different story to tell. After being turned away from numerous interviews he says, "I have had to accept the reality of being differently-abled." Ultimately with the assistance from The Fellowship for the Physically Handicapped he has set up a Public Call Office booth on Pedder Road. Sweeping aside the jargon this act also means that school administrators can be taken to court if the handicapped are denied admissions on the basis of their different ability. In 1996, the differently abled were further marginalised when governmental responsibility for them was shunted from the Ministry of Human Resources to the Ministry of Social Welfare. Mithu Alur points out that where one stands in terms of Government recognition is, "central to their perceptions of self confidence".

Most differently abled people consider their abilities to be part of their life experience. It is part of how they become the way they are. Attaching a stigma to it, pitying them or trying to make them overcome their different

abilities, display our own shortcomings. We hinder them with our negative stereotypes.

The handicapped must be understood for what they can contribute to society, which could range from super-intellectual as in the case of Stephen Hawking or providing company in a subtle almost spiritual way.

Wheelchair users are human beings first and with different abilities second. To have a first class mind and heart trapped in a body that refuses to listen is a tremendous strain. No pity or sympathy is required to set it right - only a good dose of common sense.

We are not merely talking attitudes here- but also about the actual physical possibility of living a decent, independent life. Self-respect and dignity are not too much to ask for.

To borrow a phrase from Rushdie, the differently abled are Midnight's children: they neither see the light of day which so-called reforms promise nor are they actually pushed into the darkness of oblivion because that would make the rest of us feel guilty. □

Automated doors are presently in two forms- doors with detection pads laid before them and doors with infra-red detectors which open when the beam is obstructed, the former is in use at Jaslok Hospital.



EUNIQUE RECOVERIES

Rather than working only where their sexuality is exploited, new avenues can be created for the eunuchs. ANSHIKA MISRA reports

They wait in silence. A man walks up to the door and rings the bell. An eye reaches up to the peephole and the door clicks open.

The man is confronted with not just the face he saw through the peephole but with four others. Perspiration streams down his face, as he is embarrassed to be seen with the four strangers. They are eunuchs and contrary to common belief they are not here to beg but to fulfill a professional mission.

Our lives, have in one way or the other been touched by them, for, the eunuchs have never failed to evoke emotions in us: fear, embarrassment, contempt, curiosity or just plain disdain. But compassion is what Mr B R Shetty, owner of a small credit society in Matunga, felt for them. With his Unique Recoveries, he took the initiative of exploiting the negotiating abilities of the eunuchs to extract money from defaulters.

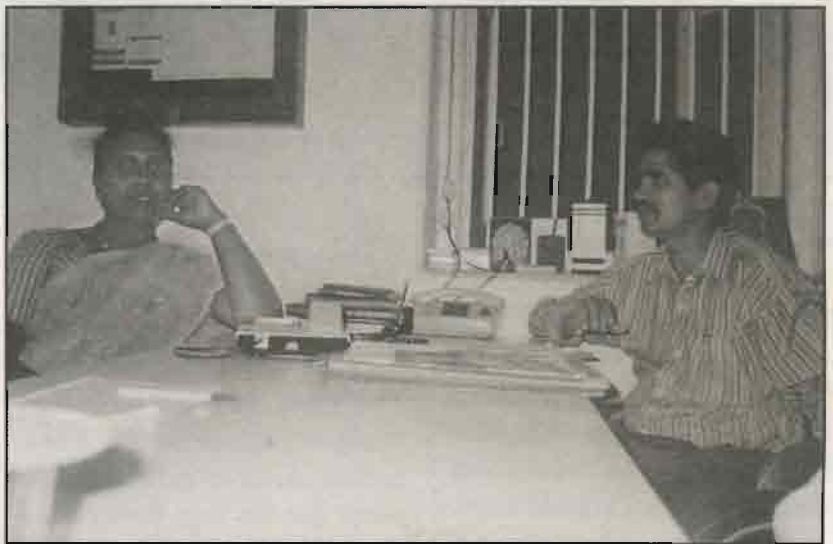
Inspired and convinced by ex-deputy municipal commissioner, Mr. G R Khairnar, who attempted

to rehabilitate the eunuchs, Shetty started off with six eunuchs and now provides employment to 20. He doesn't regret it. "They are aggressive and never return empty-handed," he says. In one year, they have managed to recover Rs. five lakhs. Several companies, like Co-operative Bank, ELBEE Couriers and SKYNET have since appointed Unique Recoveries for their recovery work.

Radhika, one of the eunuchs in this Unique Recovery team, proudly displays her identity card, which describes her as a 'recovery

officer'. To her the card represents a new beginning. "I'm glad that at last somebody has acknowledged our existence," she says. "Having a regular job makes me feel a part of the society. It makes me feel needed," says Radhika, who has now started purchasing tickets while travelling by the local trains.

They are paid a salary of Rs. 3,000 a month plus Rs. 150 on days that they make rounds for recovery from debtors. "The money doesn't amount to much but I take pride in this work of dignity," says Radhika, who



A new lease to survival: Radhika and Mr Shetty discuss business



continues to be a dancer along with her new job.

Mr. Shetty is very happy with the yields from the eunuchs. He hopes to start a bank exclusively for eunuchs, who at present have no access to financial institutions. "The entire staff from the peon to the manager would be eunuchs. However, the biggest hurdle is the police, who have accused me of using illegal means to further business," claims Shetty.

The three-lakh strong eunuch community in Mumbai, however, is not very happy with Shetty's move. "The seven 'Gurus' or 'Nayaks' who remote control the entire population of eunuchs in Mumbai are not happy with us taking up this job. But as long as

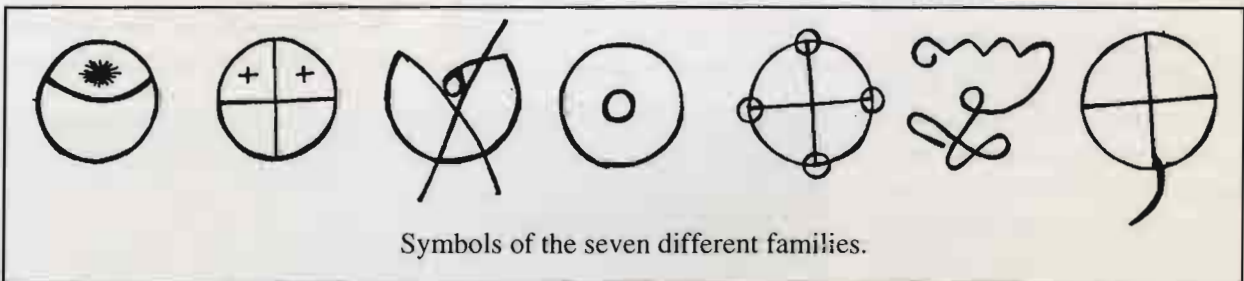
to demarcate territory. The seven Nayaks settle everything - from disputes regarding territory to squabbles arising out of personal differences -- in the Panchayat. Which is why they are never involved in any litigation.

Very little is known about this close-knit community, which has been forced into oblivion. This unconcern only adds to the injustice perpetrated on them for they are considered neither male nor female, their names are absent from the voter's list, they have no ration cards, no right to property and no access to employment opportunities. The eunuchs, or the third gender are very much here, however hard we may try to wish them away.

people rejected by a world that fears otherness to assert their right to dignity, than to celebrate their togetherness.

The search for a family is common. Abandoned by their own, several eunuchs have in the past provided homes for orphans and AIDS affected children. Eunuchs in Mumbai got together to form the Dai Welfare Society, which hopes to fight for adoption rights, getting basic amenities such as ration cards, to generating mainstream employment opportunities.

It is unfair that despite a majority of the eunuchs being educated they have no other employment option but to beg, dance or prostitute themselves.



Symbols of the seven different families.

we continue to give them the 'hafta' they are satisfied," says Radhika. The entire community is close knit, with a strict hierarchy. They are organized into seven families, each headed by one of the seven Nayaks who reside in Byculla. Each family has its own symbol, which they use

The community organises gatherings where the hijras meet and interact with hijras of other parts of the country and the world. The 'Hijra Samelan' in Delhi's Shalimar Bagh in October was a defiant claim to existence in a world that has kept them on the fringe. What better way for a

Priya S, son (now daughter, she insists) of a successful CA in Chennai has a diploma in air-conditioning repair but knows that nobody will give her a job. Radhika, who comes from Tamil Nadu is HSC pass and was unable to study further as the authorities refused to register her as female



in her pass certificate. Shabeena Francis, another eunuch on Shetty's team is a graduate.

Mr. Khairnar took a bold step when he sought the help of the educated eunuchs to rescue sex workers from Kamathipura. "Compared to men, the eunuchs are a safer bet. Men can be risky to escort the rescued girls back home. Besides, not many women volunteer for such jobs," he says. After all, in history eunuchs have been guards to the prized women of many a kings. Their services can be utilized in several areas such as security in the ladies

railway compartments and in subways.

It may come as a surprise but eunuchs have in the recent past been elected as mayors and municipal counselors. Kamala Jaan, a eunuch from Katni in Madhya Pradesh is now the mayor of Katni. Meena Kinnar, another eunuch from Jabalpur district defeated her BJP rival by 2259 votes to become chairperson of the municipality.

Legend has it that eunuchs waited for 14 years on the banks of the river Sarayu to welcome

Lord Rama back to Ayodhya. Why the wait, he asked them. They reminded him that while starting out on his 14-year exile he had asked all men and women to return to Ayodhya and being neither the eunuchs were bound to stay put. Rama blessed them: in Kalyug you will rule.

It is time, they know. And it is time that political parties paid attention to their slogan: '*Nikamme netaon ka ek ilaj, hijron ke sar pe rakho taj*' (The only remedy to the useless politicians is to give power to the eunuchs). □

*With Best
Compliments*

From :

Trichem

**219, Vyapar Bhavan, 2nd Flr.,
49, P'Demello Road, Masjid
Bunder, Mumbai - 400 009.**

Phone : 373 7020, 373 9352

Fax : 373 7021

Email : trichem@bom8.vsnl.net.in

*With Best
Compliments*

of :

**RALLIS
INDIA
LIMITED**

**Ralli House,
21, D. S. Marg,
Mumbai 400 001.**



I believe that nothing can be greater than a business, however small it may be, that is governed by conscience, and that nothing can be meaner or more petty than a business, however large, governed without honesty and without brotherhood.

— *The First Viscount Leverhulme*



Hindustan Lever Limited

The Dalit Woman Writes Back

*And her work is a searing indictment of a double marginalisation:
based on gender and caste.*

By **KANCHAN A MIRCHANDANI**

*"Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves
in the rock of my heart
I must tread this forest with wary steps
Eyes fixed on the changing times
The tables have turned now
Protests spark
Now here
Now there.
I have been silent all these days
Listening to the voice of right and wrong
But now I will fan the flames
For human rights....."*

— *Jyoti Lanjewar*

Indian women have been peripheral to their society. However a large number of them face a far worse marginalisation. Besides the gender bias they face, these women are confronted with a severe caste bias against them; casteism being inherent in the Indian society. They belong to the Dalit community -- a community, which faces both economic exploitation and cultural oppression.

Today, more than fifty years after India granted ideals like democracy and secularism to her citizens, caste biases still burgeon. "Of course changes have taken place, but these are mere shifts," says Pradnya Lokhande, a

renowned Dalit writer residing in Mumbai. Narrating her experiences she says, "the caste war has transcended in the city only to become a class war combined with the casteist politics where even the personal has become political."

Pradnya's point of view is further elaborated by the Sahitya Sanskruti Mandal award winner, the poet Urmila Pawar. She says, "In the villages the caste system is still dominant, it was only in the colonial period that any attempt was really made to consolidate India completely." Her writings reflect the horror of the Dalit experience, and the heightened suffering of the women.

The origin of Dalit Literature, she says, is based on the need to communicate the sufferings of the Dalit to the outside world. Urmila, who comes from the Mahad village in the Konkan region says that being subjugated from time immemorial the Dalits were inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's speech at Mahad in 1927. They made a significant attempt to transcend the discrimination they faced. This conference, which turned into a movement started with the British government allowing the Dalits to access water from a particular town tank. This however was ferociously opposed by the dominant Brahmanic force, which had embedded in them a caste discrimination directed especially against the Dalits. The Brahmins objected to a Dalit entering a temple, pelted stones and put charcoal on his face if he dared to disobey them. This conference which became the Mahad Satyagraha, marked the onset of the untouchable liberation movement, which did not succeed in getting them water but did end with the public burning of the Manusmriti - the law book of Hinduism.

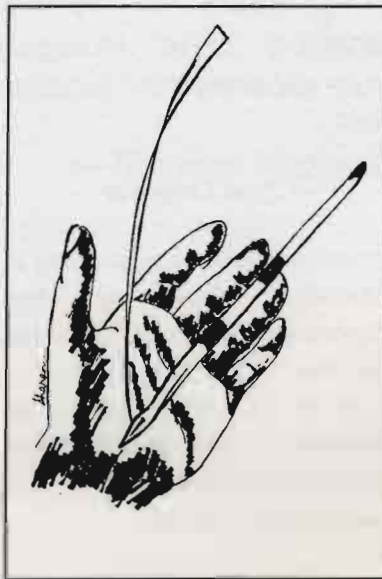


It was on the basis of the Manusmriti and other such scriptures, says Urmila Pawar, that the hegemonic Brahminic forces justified such atrocities on the Dalits. "For the Dalit woman the condition was worse," says Pradnya Lokhande, "because the Manusmriti, the Sanskrit core of Hinduism is essentially anti-woman." This injustice is reflected in the writings of feminist Dalit writers till today. They drew inspiration from Pandita Ramabai, a Brahman widow's actions. Unable to withstand the atrocities inflicted on her by her own kind, she had criticized the dominant Brahman patriarchy and converted to Christianity -- something that was unheard of in those days.

Pandita Ramabai has inspired Dalit women writers like Hira Bansode, Urmila Pawar, Pradnya Lokhande with her statements like, "Those who diligently and impartially read Sanskrit Literature in the original, cannot fail to recognize the law-giver Manu as one of those hundreds who have done their best to make women hateful beings in the world's eye...there are only two things on which all those books, the Dharmashastras, the sacred epics, the Puranas and the modern poets, the popular preachers of the present-day and orthodox high-caste men, were agreed: that women of high and low caste as

a class were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth; and that they could not get Moksha as men could."

The core of Hinduism is fundamentally patriarchal. A few writers like Kabir, Nanak, Jyotiba Phule and Dr Ambedkar wrote in defiance of this system. "These writers," says Urmila Pawar, "comprehended the needs of the Dalit masses." It was truly through their work that different



phases of the Dalit movement "opened up new ways of looking at the structures of their oppression and the premises of their emancipation."

Even today, the Dalit literati look up to Phule's work, who saw the caste system as, "the essence of Hinduism," and attempted to unmask the cultural oppression

that it sustained and the brutal slavery it sanctified. He reinterpreted the Aryan theory making it a critique of Brahminism where he showed the Aryans emerging as cruel invaders who subjugated an egalitarian society and imposed a 'hierarchical and exploitative system' with Hinduism as its legitimising ideology. His major works include *Gulamgiri* and *Sarvajanic Satya Dharma* -- a thesis on male-female equality.

Both Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Pandita Ramabai worked for female education too. Due to their efforts, there are women writers in India today.

"But Phule's work was not given as much recognition because he came from an Oppressed Backward Class," says Pradnya Lokhande. This, she says was the case with Tarabai Shinde's work too. Her sole known testament the *Stri-Purush Tulna* is a precursor of one of the first well-known feminist works, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. Tarabai's language is harsh - a common phenomenon in Dalit writing. Tarabai wrote, "Where all blame is put on women, and the terrible examples of male arrogance are ignored...where morality appears only one-sided." Here she was referring to the debate on widows who were blamed for trying to dispose off their babies, when the



implication of sexual assaults made on them were ignored. Tarabai attacked the whole pattern of life laid out for women, and questioned the concept of 'Stri Dharma'. "What is Stri Dharma?" she writes, "Endless devotion to a single husband, behaving according to his whims. Even if he beats her, curses her, keeps a prostitute, takes bribes... when he returns home she should worship him... as if Krishna Maharaj himself had come... there are a million reasons for breaking Pativrata."

Tarabai's work takes the form of a bitter polemic; it is a satirical attack on the scriptures in a language of familiarity. This was the way Dalit women talked about known stories. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata were a part of lives of the majority but not necessarily a part of religion. When Hindu theorists made them scriptures, women like Ramabai and Tarabai attacked and rejected them. Both these women characterized Hinduism as a patriarchal ideology, questioning the traditional morals embodied in Brahmanic texts, and seeing them as the basis of women's oppression and patriarchal domination. Tarabai's realistic writing has become the vision for feminist as well as Dalit women writers who reflect the unfairness of the dominant patriarchal society in their works.

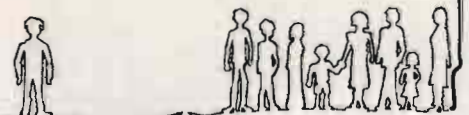
In the 19th century itself, women were raising their voices against the 'nationalist resolution of the women's question'. But these women could not see rishis and gods as symbols of divinity without feeling inferior. Yet later, many of the 'highly placed' activists compromised on these issues. With the formation of the All India Women's Conference in the twenties, some changes did come about for the benefit of women. But these elite women organizations worked in the Hindu framework and spoke of Sita and Savitri as ideals for women, not as symbols of male oppression. The radical voices of early feminists were buried under the weight of a more accepting and upper class pre-independence women's movement.

However, that didn't last. In the post independence era, the women's movement gained a new momentum, with the underlying theme that "all religions are patriarchal and oppress women". The writings of people like Ramabai and Tarabai gained prominence once again, thus representing the many facets of male oppression, rather than accepting them as divinely ordained ideals of human relationships.

These influences have filtered down and are present in

the writings of Dalit women writers like Hira Bansode, Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, Pradnya Lokhande and others. The language used by them is generally sharp, perhaps it would not be too wrong to say, that the usage of such language is characteristic of Dalit writing. Where abuses are taboo in other literature, in Dalit writing they constitute for day to day vocabulary. As these women writers say, that their manner of speaking is analogous to their articulation when putting the pen on paper. "Where refined language is a characteristic of almost every literature, Dalit Literature does not conform to this norm," says Urmila Pawar.

Pawar's writing is mainly autobiographical in nature. Being a feminist writer she has gripped the weaknesses of the Dalit male to a certain specificity: which can only be truly understood by a Dalit woman. Her major works include *Chauthi Bhint* (The Fourth Wall), *Nyaya* (Justice), *Amihi Itihaas Ghadavla* (We too Made History). She says, "Our writing cannot be compared with the literature of the brahmins, because our situations are extremely different in every respect. For example, if a brahmin takes to drink, it is because he chooses to, but if a dalit drinks hooch, it is to get immune to the



stench when he burns dead bodies and goes scavenging."

Pradnya Lokhande who expresses her views in her prize winning poetry collection, *Anthastha* (The Inner One), says, "We don't have representatives speaking for us, no one writes books on Dalits. We are the only ones who represent our reality. There are hundreds of poets writing at present. A lot of their writings are expressions of uncontrolled anger, but their writing really depends on their experiences."

The autobiographical style is predominant among Dalit writings. The melange of themes included in their short stories, poems, autobiographies, essays and speeches are closely

associated with the movement for change. To state a few: the struggle for survival, the emotional universe of a Dalit, the man-woman relationship, an existence crushed under the wheels of village life, experiences of humiliation and atrocities; at times abject submission, at other times, rebellion.

The Dalit point of view constitutes a clear diagnosis of a particular social reality and a sanguine hope for its desirable transformation. A Dalit point of view accompanied by Dalit consciousness would not necessarily result in great Dalit literature. But an original and important Dalit work of literature would emerge only when a Dalit point of view would visualise

itself through concrete experience. It would also prove to be a deep and powerful picture of human life thirsty for freedom. It is important for us to see Dalit Literature in this light and have the same expectation from it.

Indian life still remains to be penetrated by Dalit literature in the real sense. Dalit literature can perform this task through Dalit experience. As we have different streams of literature for different issues, like Black literature, feminist literature, socialist literature so must Dalit literature also have its separate space and distinct identity. Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change. And Dalit women are an active part of this movement. □

With Best Compliments

From :

ALKEM LABORATORIES LIMITED

**Manufacturers of Quality
Pharmaceuticals**

*Phoenix House,
462 Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel,
Mumbai-13*

Authorized Training Centre for

Tally Lotus
Autodesk Corel

Courses Conducted for

DTP, Web Page Designing,
Animation, Multimedia,
Ms-Office, Corel Draw,
Photoshop, Pagemaker,
Computerised Accounting.

"With Best Compliments From"

Big byte
INSTITUTE OF COMPUTER
ART & TECHNOLOGIES

16, Garodia Shpg. Cntr. Garodia Nagar, Ghatkopar (E). Ph. 516 4921 / 516 6281.
13, Pandya House, 625, J.S.S. Road, Opp. Metro Cinema, Marine Lines.
Ph. 206 5888 / 207 7340.



SPACES

SCM 1999-2000

From toothpastes to desks to the world economy everything works the 'right way'. *SUSAN GEORGE feels*

Left Out

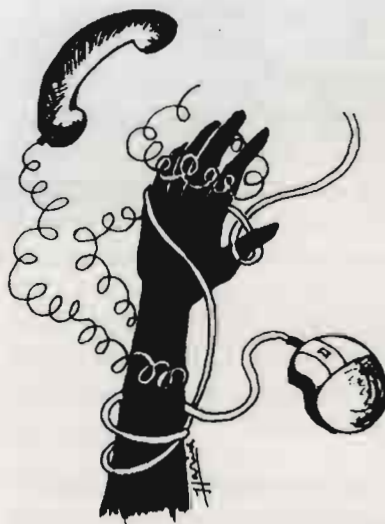
Monday morning. She's late again. Half asleep she reaches for her spectacles. She encounters the cold, hard wall. Oops! Wrong side. She tries unscrewing the cap of the toothpaste. Instead she finds herself tightening it (not again). Takes her crumpled shirt to the ironing board. Almost burns herself ironing backwards from left to right ('the Urdu way'). Buttons up her shirt in what seems to her the most absurd way and sets off for work. Just the beginning of another day in a world designed for 'righties'.

Most 'lefties' experience what they deem is the unfounded antipathy of a world dominated by the right-handed majority. One may wonder what the fuss is all about especially if the 'one' in question is a rightie who has never had a problem with lateral-organisation skills.

Life as a southpaw is a series of challenges. The most insignificant details in the right-handed world acquire prodigious proportions to the leftie. "It could be as simple a thing as lifting up the receiver of a phone, or

opening a door. For a leftie it means extra effort- we're going against our instincts," says Neha, a college student from Chennai.

Yet through centuries lefties have silently borne the prejudice intrinsic in doorknobs, buttons, every computer mouse, every pair



of scissors...A list would result in an endless inventory of items all of which conspire to render the leftie situationally handicapped.

It is not only among objects that lefties encounter an appendage bias. It is inherent in the very etymology of language. In French

'gauche', meaning left, also has connotations of clumsiness and awkwardness. The origin of the English 'left' is the Old Saxon 'lyft' meaning worthless. In Latin 'sinister' or left connotes malevolence. Even today, in common usage phrases such as 'left-handed' compliment only serve to contribute to the bias against the leftie.

Annie, a leftie, claims immediate camaraderie with other southpaws. "While in college we formed a Lefties Liaison - a forum for 'like-handed' people to air their problems," she says enthusiastically. Lefties have the undeniable privilege of belonging to a fraternity of members who include the likes of Mark Twain and Michael Angelo. Desi inspiration comes from the 'angry young man' himself, Amitabh Bachchan. Today lefties can even celebrate their alternate handedness, 13th August being set apart as International Left-Hander's Day.

Yet, despite these distinct privileges, more often than not, lefties find themselves in



awkward situations simply because they are 'Differently Horizontally Organised'.

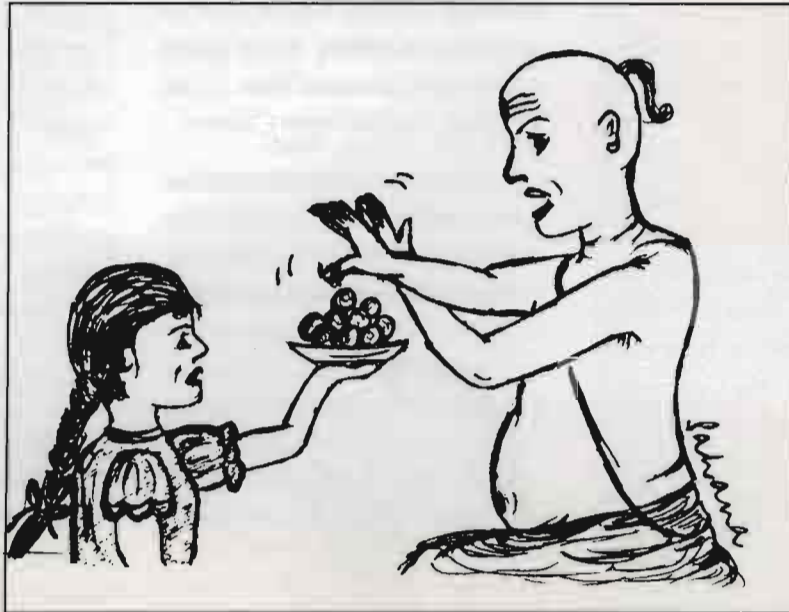
In the world of academics lefties have a distinct disadvantage. From school chairs designed with desk-tops on the right, to teachers repeatedly criticising hand-writing tilted the 'wrong way', lefties have to encounter prejudice at every stage of their academic life.

For Anindita, a student from Delhi, her list of woes commences with flunking kindergarten painting as she was forced to draw with her right hand.

"When we were being taught to write, we were made to remember you are to write with your right and I was writing the wrong way," says Anindita.

The world over, southpaws have been discriminated against. In India, where the left is associated with the unclean, lefties face a considerable dilemma. "I won't ever forget the time I gave a priest a thali of 'prashad' with my left hand...I instantly qualified as an outcast," says Anindita. Unable to adapt to Indian tradition in this respect,

lefties are often caught unawares. "A few weeks ago I served my aunt with my left hand and she threatened never visiting my home again" recalls Neha. Indian myths dictate that lefties have a



shorter life span, are in cahoots with rakshasas and are even accused of being mentally imbalanced.

It is important that these myths are not perpetuated. Research however reveals that lefties are more prone to Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and motor difficulties are more prevalent among left-handed persons. However, this does not result from the physical structure of the brain or any psychological malfunction. Rather research concludes that the pressure

exerted on lefties to conform to the dominance of the right hand induces learning disorders and a lowering of self-confidence.

Often, in an almost consolatory manner the world decides that

lefties are excessively creative and aesthetically oriented. Even if this acclaim is valid, it is a generalization, which simply adds to the demands made on the leftie.

Yet lefties find themselves

conditioned to the mind-set of the right-handed world. As Neha says, "I'm so conditioned into thinking left is awkward, it is only when I see my reflection in the mirror, that I think I am 'normal'."

Yet, if lefties were to apply the logic of the right handed world that the right side is equated to being right, then they could find solace - if the right side of the brain controls the left side and vice-versa then only lefties are in the "right mind".

□



"My underwear was in focus, not my shot"

A hundred years after de Coubertin declared that women's role in sports should be restricted to garlanding the victorious male, women sports are still treated as beauty contests. DURGA RAGHUNATH and SONU MUNSHI try to find out why

A few months before the 20th Century could pass discreetly, Serena Williams declared that she wanted to play men's tennis. She was told that her wish to play in an Association of Tennis Professionals tour, 'was a pretty good joke'.

The attempt to trivialise and ridicule Williams's desire to play in the men's tour was similar to the treatment meted out to Billy Jean King when she squared up against Riggs. King however set the record straight beating him in three straight sets. The polarised viewpoints that this issue raised yet again in the Williams controversy made an attempt to find any middle ground, futile. Once more the same questions were raised: men vs women, who is stronger, tougher, faster? Do men indulge in professional sports for reasons that are different from those that motivate women?

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of modern games is remembered for his proclamation, 'women have one task, that of crowning the winner with garlands'. Thank the goddess, women didn't pay too much

attention. This constant comparison and assertion that women can play but will never be as good as the men is not only way off the mark but is demeaning to a whole generation of women who have graced the sporting arena.

Sharda Ugra, one of *The Hindu's* leading sports correspondents says, "It is also in some ways a trap. As though women's sport were some insubstantial thing, given shape, form and consequence only when held up against men's sports or when given male approval. It is more about women competing against their peers, against their conditioning and against their circumstances."

This conditioning was shaped from the early times when it was thought that vigorous sport would damage a woman's capacity to bear children. Science and Fanny Blankers-Koen shattered that myth. Blankers-Koen, a mother of four, won four athletic gold medals in the 1948 Olympics after Jesse Owens, the only other athlete in Olympic history to do the same. In the Indian context,

even if PT Usha may have broken the shackles, most women are still hesitant to commit their lives to sport. Diana Eduljee, arguably India's most famous woman cricketer says, "The only two organisations that offer employment to sportswomen in Bombay are the Indian Airlines and Western Railways. Matches between the two are spread over a mere 15 days in a year as against mens cricket, which one sees nearly every day. This is hardly any motivation for women to play the sport seriously."

Nisha Millet, India's ace swimmer, Nirupama Vaidyanathan the national top seed in women's tennis and Aparna Poppat, badminton's new rising star -- are however some women who have been consistently successful. Ugra accounts this 'larger participation' in certain sports such as tennis, swimming, badminton and squash as against cricket and hockey to the common assumption that the former four are considered 'feminine' whereas the latter aren't. The omnipresent view still remains that women



with muscles, strength and endurance are in some way unfeminine.

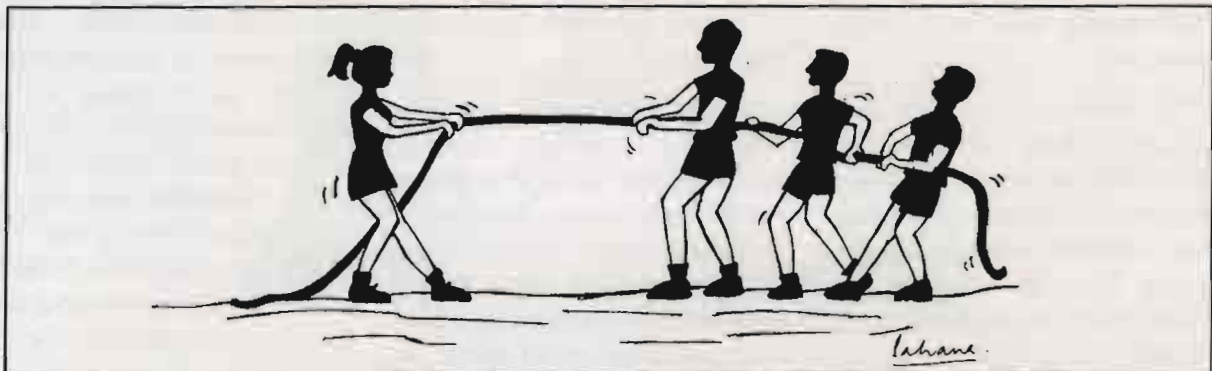
A recent international law passed in Women's Volleyball declares that all women must wear briefs, not shorts, while on court. This measure, they clearly state, is to glamourise the sport. Italy and Venezuela have protested, but it is unlikely that the law will be changed. Whatever the sport, it seems to be imperative that femininity is

viewers are men, they will call the shots," says Ugra. Eduljee agrees, "The same man has been controlling womens' cricket in Mumbai for the last 15 years. Though I am no more a part of international cricket, they have come up with every reason possible to prevent me from being involved in any kind of decision making." Huysent Nazaret, a leading hockey coach, actively involved over many years with hockey in Mumbai adds, "Though retired sportswomen can and must

difference in media coverage."

However, the womens' cricket World Cup was very well organised by the federations, "so they can when they want to," says Eduljee. The final at Eden Gardens, Calcutta attracted a sixty thousand crowd that remained for the entire match. Even if they came out of idle curiosity, it was not long before Belinda Carlisle's elegant stroke play had them glued to their seats.

As much as sponsorship will



asserted every step of the way. Nirupama Vaidyanathan, currently India's leading tennis player protested vehemently against a photograph published in *The Times of India* where her skirt was flying and her panties were in full view. She says, "My underwear was in focus, not my shot. I'm not used to that kind of thing; it made me very uncomfortable. I detest that kind of publicity anyway. It takes away from what I've achieved in terms of the sport."

"But if 85 per cent of the

be involved with training and motivating youngsters, this hardly happens. Their own experiences have made them so resentful and angry, that, on the contrary, they discourage their own children from entering the sporting arena."

Nazaret blames the low popularity of women's sport on the lack of aggressive marketing. One of the reasons for the success of men's cricket was aggressive Public Relations. "When an Azhar is dropped and when Diana or the one of the hockey players is dropped, you can clearly see the

dictate the marketing of a personality as in the case of, say, an Anna Kournikova, sportswomen must be valued for different things. Not only times clocked, distances run, runs scored and titles won, but what the individual women meant to their times. When Hassiba Boulmerka, the first Arab woman to win an Olympic Gold, won the 400 metre gold in the 1984 Olympics -- she let out a primal scream -- it was she said, "a cry from the heart of every Algerian woman, every Arabian woman..."

It was her rebel yell. □



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WOMEN?

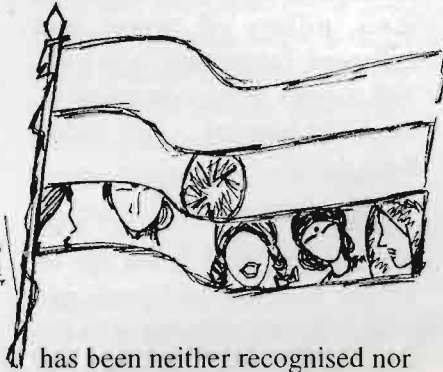
They took everyone by surprise then. And their contributions will make you sit up even today. MEGHA BAHREE talks to some of the women who were integral to India's freedom struggle

9th August 1942, Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay: The early morning air steamed with speeches and slogans. The night before a momentous decision had been taken: it was time for the British to quit India. Amidst the shouts and the cheers, the lathi charges and the tear gas came Aruna Asif Ali, firebrand revolutionary. She vaulted onto the stage and hoisted the Indian tricolour.

One narrative of our history sees Mahatma Gandhi as the catalyst who mobilised women and brought them into the freedom struggle. But history belies that. Women had participated in the struggle since its early days. In *The Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny 1857-'59*, Forbes Mitchell records a woman, who armed with a heavy old pattern piston sat on a peepal tree and killed half-a-dozen people. Another woman became famous under the name of 'Maid of Delhi'. She would go to the battlefield in a 'savar's' uniform and was reported to have been more effective than five sepoys. Around 1905, some 500 women met at Jenokand village, district Murshidabad to protest against the government's decision to

enforce the sale of British goods and to urge the need to use Indian goods.

Unfortunately, despite the participation of the thousands of women their effort and sacrifice



has been neither recognised nor recorded. "India had no dearth of woman power," writes author Usha Bala in *Indian Women Freedom Fighters, 1857-1947*. "However, their courage and dedication has been left unsung in our history. Women launched movements to acquire their rights, for the removal of social injustice, discrimination between sexes and to support the freedom struggle." Many women laid down their lives in the battlefield, but their names still remain unknown.

Women of all ages participated in the freedom struggle. Some started as young as 13 to 14 years of age if not earlier. Jawaharlal Nehru aptly described the

situation, "Most of the men folk were in prisons. Then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but also their own men folk by surprise." Women attended meetings, distributed anti-British pamphlets and posters, picketed, conducted strikes and morchas in schools and colleges, built barricades against the police and in the process more than one was arrested, beaten up or thrown out of her college for her active participation.

Freedom fighter and member of the Congress Socialist Party, Usha Mehta went against her family when she resolved to help in the successful execution of the Quit India Movement. With her friends she launched a secret radio station 'The Voice of Freedom' or the 'Congress Radio', which broadcast news and talks in Hindustani. Hounded by the authorities, they were constantly on the move till their arrest on 13th November 1942. During her four-year imprisonment the British tried their level best to get some information out of her.



However, all attempts proved futile and she stood her ground.

Usha Mehta was not a lone case. There were hundreds like her who were "inspired and overwhelmed by the atmosphere. Says Kala Joshi, another freedom fighter, "Unlike today, we had great leaders to look up to. We were all very impressed by the purpose." Along with a host of friends and colleagues she, at the age of 14, participated in the meetings and demonstrations at Shivaji Park, picketed from school and distributed the literature and pamphlets as part of the student's movement and even got arrested in the process.

Similarly, Tara Reddy at the age of 16 was responsible for conducting a strike at her own college and at others. An active member of the All India Students Federation (AISF) she, along with her friends, boycotted the convocation because the guest of honour was an Englishman. She roused and enthused other youngsters and ensured that college after college and mill after mill shut shop. She was repeatedly arrested and jailed for her participation in the Satyagrah.

During the Naval Mutiny on 18th February 1946, which was supported by the armed forces, she, along with textile workers, students and residents, protested on the streets against the unfair treatment of the Indian soldiers. "We formed a strike committee,

met people and gathered support," recalls Mrs. Reddy. This ultimately bore fruit as the Union Jack was pulled down from all the ships and was replaced by three flags: the Communist Party of India (CPI) flag, the Congress flag and the Muslim League flag. "The British army descended on the streets of Bombay and the struggle climaxed in their defeat on the 22nd of February. It was almost their last fight since all the three pillars of power had collapsed. I remember there were 300 corpses in the compound of the KEM hospital - 300 within three days."

Another like them was Neelaprabha, who at the age of 14 got thoroughly beaten up, trampled upon and shot at in the Goa Liberation Movement. Her ankle still bears the scar of the bayonet with which a Portuguese soldier had attacked her. She recalls, "*Ek josh tha ki kuch bhi ho jaye main Goa ke sangharsh mein hi jaongi. Hamara motto tha - lathi goli khaeynge, phir bhi Goa jayenge. Chalo- chalo, Goa chalo. Azad Goa zindabad.*" (There was a fervour in us that irrespective of what may happen, we will go to Goa. Our motto was - we'll withstand beatings and bullets but to Goa we will go. Let's go to Goa. Long-live free Goa).

Unfortunately, records, which portray the role of the Indian women in the freedom struggle,

are extremely rare. Says Swarupa Kamat, a History professor at Sophia College, "The success of the Swadeshi movement was facilitated by the sacrifices of housewives. They were expected to maintain the quality of life despite the lack of means. They were to refrain, for example, from using refined sugar yet were expected to make the same sweetmeats. Moreover they had to renounce all foreign clothes and weave their own cloth." Indira Gandhi, in her autobiography, *Indira Gandhi - My Truth*, records the huge pile of 'rich materials' in 'lovely colours', 'the heaps of velvet and satin, silks and chiffons' that were burnt on the terrace and were replaced by homespun khadi. "The khadi was coarse and rough as sacking and wherever her mother's skin had rubbed against the saree, it had become sore and red," she writes.

"The sad fact," says Swarupa Kamat, "is that historians usually focussed on women who were related to the Nehru family or the Congress party. But even these women were never given the status of freedom fighters in their own right and received only a cursory mention." What's worse is that despite their innumerable sacrifices and their intense fight for their land, our historians continue to ignore their contributions thus depriving a people of a huge chunk of their history. □



At The Bus Stop

Three lines is all they thought she deserved. But for RATI SUD the mornings were never the same

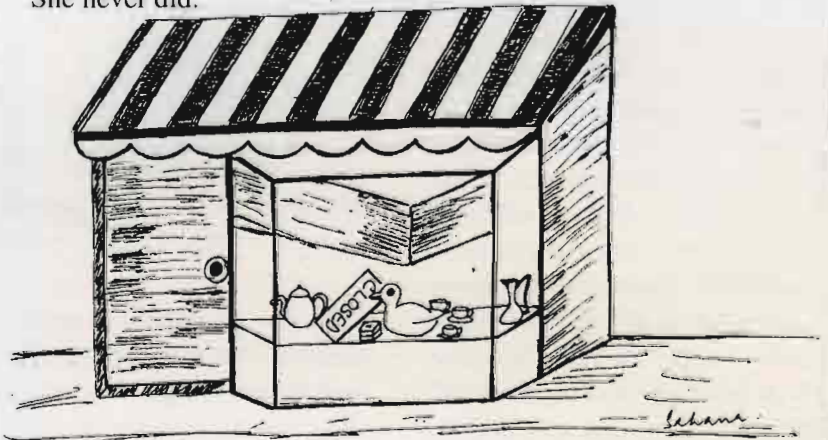
I noticed the closed sign every morning as I waited for the bus at Union Park, Khar bus stop. Someone had tucked the upside down chunk of yellowed cardboard between the porcelain ducks and a ten-piece silver tea setting. The error perpetually annoyed me, and everyday I wanted to reach through the dusty glass and set the sign right.

Only god knew how anyone could make the same mistake everyday though this disorientation fit with the general condition of the store. Dust decorated the collection of odds and ends, including the sign and the building itself sagged, its roof missing a few red shingles, and several panes of its faceted bay window bore cracks. The faded gold letters on the display window declared this an antique store. The store itself had become antique.

And every morning an old woman would hobble up the street, kerchief tied tightly around her head, shopping bags scraping the ground as she walked. She studied the window displays of the other shop before finally pausing before the doors to hers, grinning at me as she fished out her keys, exchanging a few words

of greeting before pushing her way into the dim interior to settle behind the counter. Sometimes she chatted with me about her long dead husband, George, and the short sweet years after his retirement from the post office when they had made a living here. George, she said, knew how to run a business, had a mind for those kind of details. And every morning, she noticed the sidewalk and the dirt caked thickly between the cracks. She shook her head and said she'd have to sweep.

She never did.



Sometimes, she would talk about a time when she cleaned the shop twice a day, complaining about how the dust always settled again around her after each sweeping. And always, just behind her, George would come, straightening shelves of stock that

her sweeping had put into disarray.

She said he liked things organised. He grew agitated when things got mislaid or disturbed. Once in a while, after George's death, she used to tip a picture frame or turn a piece of bric-a-brac just for fun, half wishing George would come and set it right.

He never did.


Then, I read her obituary in the local paper, three lines that

mentioned nothing about George, or my daily coming to the bus stop. I felt the lack of her no more morning chit-chat, no more talk about the dust or George. Yet, on the morning after the day of her death, I did notice someone had straightened the sign. □





**...when you need assured performance
from filters**

 **Pall Corporation**

Marketing Division
PALL PHARMALAB FILTRATION PVT. LTD.
Star Metal Compound, L.B.S. Marg, Vikhroli (W),
Mumbai 400 083. Tel: 22-5789105. Fax: 22-5789106
E-mail: pallpharmalab/ppfp@pallindina.com

Why a married woman can't say "NO"

The Indian Penal Code makes it clear. No man can rape his wife unless she is under 15 years.

SONAL MAKHIJA wonders who's to blame

"I was being battered and what followed was sexual abuse. I wasn't aware of the term marital rape. But I knew that what was happening to me wasn't right," says Rinki Bhattacharya founder of a helpline that counsels victims of domestic violence.

Ms. Bhattacharya walked out of her 19-year-old marriage when she realised she was a victim of marital rape. She registered a case under section 498 A of the Indian Penal Code that deals with domestic violence. However she could not charge her husband with sexual abuse in the absence of any such law.

This is not a rare occurrence. The rape of a woman by her husband happens every night in some house or the other; a right is violated, a body is abused and a legal system remains blindfolded. It is not a new phenomenon. Marital rape is probably as old as the institution of marriage itself. But the term itself is fairly new.

As L Kelly, a feminist writer states in the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, "In order to define something a word has to exist and the name, once known, must be applicable to one's experience."

Like Ms Bhattacharya, many women simply do not define their experience as the term 'marital rape' came into being much after the existence of such an experience itself. It does not help women that the law does not allow the naming of names.

For according, to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, "Rape is sexual intercourse without



consent or against the will of the woman". It lays down 6 instances of rape, which qualify as offences. There is an exception to this section, which reads, "Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under 15 years of age, is not rape". Which means no husband can rape his wife as long as she is 15 years and a few months or older. Which means no wife can say "No" and enforce it.

This law stems from a patriarchal society where a woman's existence is defined by her marriage. She is not only economically dependent but also socially dependent on the man. The problem also lies in the fact that the Indian Penal Code was drafted by Lord Macaulay in the late 19th century. Its ethical underpinnings were a reflection of Victorian morality, a code of social behavior which in turn reflects the Judaeo-Christian partiality for the patriarchy.

The Code is as much responsible for the women's situation as the society. Feminist texts have reiterated that this means a negation of personal freedom, a subsuming of a woman's sexual identity and ownership of her body to the fact of her marriage. As Vrinda Nabar, author of *Caste As Woman*, says, "Women are socialised and conditioned into believing that they exist only to fulfil their husbands' desires, moreover, sexual needs. And, it is an unwritten rule that he can always do what he wants to do without being questioned."

The woman has no say and when she does refuse to submit



she supposedly denies the husband her duty as a wife. This confusion about conjugal rights and a woman's social role as a 'good wife' has been reiterated not just by the society but also reinforced by the law. As Veena Gowda, a lawyer advocating women's issues says, "Matrimonial laws are personal and based on religion. Though criminal law in India does not recognise marital rape, civil law can intervene to order restitution of conjugal rights. This means that if either spouse refuses to comply with sexual demands made by the partner, it amounts to cruelty and is considered a marital offense. Once again, a woman cannot say, "No". Once again a woman is treated as the property of her husband."

Kelly adds, "Rape laws were

originally enacted as property laws, to protect a man's property (a daughter or a wife) from other men, not as laws to protect women or their rights to control their bodies. Thus, the penalty of rape was intended to punish a man for defiling another man's property."

But the enemy has an outpost in most women's heads. Most Indian women do not regard forced marital sex as rape. They have been brought up to believe that providing sex is obligatory in a marital contract.

Aruna Soni, an activist from the Women's Centre states, "Wife rape should be seen as a violation of human rights and not just as a women's issue. And this is only possible if women themselves step out of the status quo which

they are socialised into being. Patriarchy and selective readings of religion place much emphasis on 'happiness of the husband' as the prime duty of the wife. Therefore, in cases of wife rape women are scared to accept the truth or identify violence." And yet an eminent woman lawyer fighting for women's issues says, "There are more serious issues involving women besides marital rape."

It's not just the law that needs to be changed but the psyche of the society and of women themselves. Until the silent majority does not look askance, the offender will get away not feeling guilty. And marital rape will remain on the fringes of not just the law and of society but above all of our mind. □

INDIAN PENAL CODE, 1860 (Section 375 & 376) SEXUAL OFFENCES

RAPE - A man is said to commit "rape" who, except in the case herein after excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the six following descriptions:-

First - Against her will.

Secondly - With out her consent.

Thirdly - With her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested in fear of death or of hurt.

Fourthly - With her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married.

Fifthly - With her consent, when at the time of giving such consent, by reason of unsoundness of mind or intoxication or administration by him personally or through another of any stupefying or unwholesome substance, she is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that to which she gives consent.

Sixthly - With or without her consent, when she is under sixteen years of age.

Explanation - Penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape.

Exception - Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape.



broken

It's the beginning
 Of an end
 And the end of
 A beginning.
 I can hear
 The distinct sounds of the shehanai
 That mingle with the
 Indian flavour
 Bespattered on my palms
 To make them red.
 Strengthened with the smoke
 Of the kitchen cloves
 Only to make them look
 Appealing
 To your eyes.
 And now
 I know
 This turmeric bath
 Was not a mindless thing to do.
 They know...
 I need some colour
 On my paling face;
 Some jewels
 To hide the restlessness
 In my heart;
 And a veil
 To cover the questions
 In my mind.
 For I am the bride.
 A flimsy sacred thread, a namesake
 That will tie two families
 Will break within me...
 My broken thread, my virtue,
 would be my precious gift to you, Stranger.
 But I hope this flimsy thread
 Will break me into freedom.
 I will then shift my focus
 To things of permanence --
 Not easily broken...

— TAMANNA AHUJA

THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK

Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri. The litany of Indian writers in English is impressive. SAUMYA ROY looks at the issues that fissure the Indian literary subcontinent

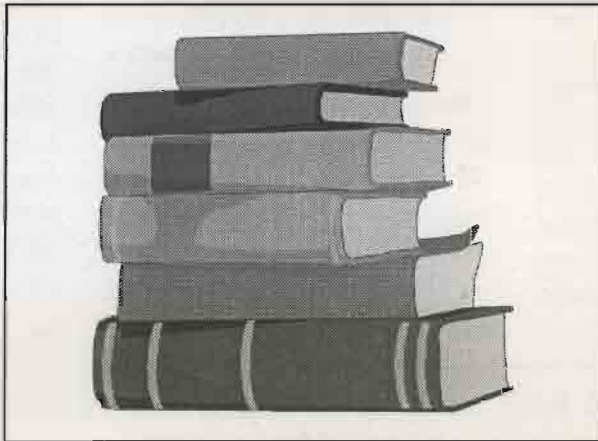
Over the last few years the empire has been writing back. The critics have waxed eloquent and the cash counters have been tinkling. After the huge advances paid to a select few, the so far romantic habit of writing has become a viable career option. Writers are acquiring the near iconic status of beauty queens in India. India is hot. Indian writing in English is hotter.

But think of all the big names in what was once known as Indo Anglican writing -- Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhuri, Shashi Tharoor -- and one common factor springs out. Almost all of them are expat Indians, writing in English, living abroad, or having lived there for a while. The only exception to the rule is Arundhati Roy.

Thus it is only natural that the authenticity of this experience is being questioned. However, there is very little space for other voices and experiences to be heard.

During the melee that marked the 50th year of Indian independence, Salman Rushdie edited a volume of the best of

Indian writing. The only non-English piece was Sadat Hassan Manto's celebrated story 'Toba Tek Singh'. Rushdie explains this surprise selection in his preface,



where he says that literature in other Indian languages has not developed to the extent writing in English has. This sparked off one of the longest raging debates in the literary world. V K M Kutty, a well known Malayalam writer and journalist says, "Rushdie doesn't even know what we write. He seems to evaluate writers on the basis of their signing amounts."

Indian writing in English (as it is now known) has been feted for reflecting a post-colonial identity. As their counterparts in other new nations, Indian writers too have

explored their sense of identity. (The only voice of dissent here is Pankaj Mishra's -- but then his statements about Indian writing are of a piece with Rushdie's.

Both write about books they do not read.) Their language and the nature of their writing has created an audience for them overseas. Critics argue that a large part of this writing consists of exoticised accounts of India written by expatriate authors to pander to western tastes. But this critique ignores the fact that the exotic is defined differently in different contexts. Allan Sillitoe's bleak stories of life in the industrial North of England would be exotic in the backwaters of Kerala; and Arundhati Roy's depiction of Ayemenem would be exotic in Hull.

Writing in most other Indian languages has grown to acquire its own identity. Written by authors who are in touch with social reality, this regional language literature is closely tied to its readers. There is a strong



tradition of regional writers taking up social and political issues. Some of the best Indian writing relates to the experience of partition. Authors like Mahasweta Devi have written about the problems of women and tribals. Regional language literature draws on a rich oral and cultural tradition.

Some critics argue that the difference between Indian writing in English and writing in other Indian languages is the 'India vs. Bharat' difference. Mr Kutty says, "Many themes taken up by Indo Anglican writers have already been written about in other Indian languages where they have been dealt with more sensitively. It is just because they write in English they get more fame and money." Which discounts, of course, the Indian writer in English who lives in India. A single monolithic rubric will suffice for those who

use the 'colonist's tongue'. They are all rich. They are all famous. They are all successful. In reality, no Indian writer in English who lives in India can afford to live by her or his pen. There simply isn't enough money in it. One Arundhati.Roy does not a royalty make.

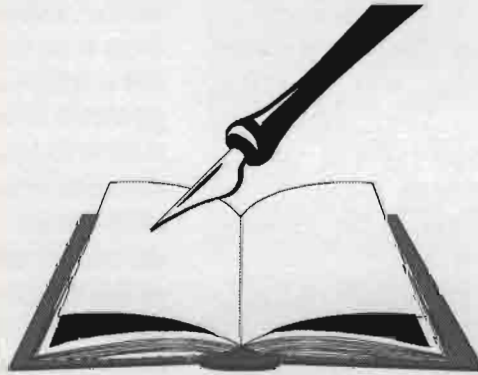
The problem lies in the restricted reach of the regional languages. When we talk of translation here, we almost inevitably talk of translation into English. No one asks whether Mahasweta Devi has been translated into Punjabi. Or whether Kalki has been translated into Bengali. The whole translation debate centres unconsciously but perhaps inevitably on the 'colonist's tongue'.

Part of the onus for this state falls on the readers. Says Harish

Trivedi, head of the English department at Delhi University and judge at the Crossword translation prize, "Indians appreciate things only when they have been lauded in the West." Indian readers are often accused of measuring and evaluating Indo Anglican writing based on their success abroad rather than in their own context.

Katha, an NGO brings out a popular series of short stories translated from various Indian languages in to English. However, Ms Geeta Dharamarajan, Head of Katha says, "While it is true that our books are quite popular, their sales are not as much as those of popular Indian writing in English."

Then well known Indo Anglican writer Mukul Kesavan says, "I don't think that either of us should question the validity of the other's reality. The truth is that Indians live and think in many different languages and cultures. In India we live in many different cultures and ages at the same time. Both of us are true to our own experience." The conflict arises when one experience is feted and it questions the validity of the other. □



*For tribal man, space was the uncontrollable mystery.
For technological man, it is time that occupies that same role.*

- Marshall McLuhan

NOT SLEEPY, GRUMPY AND SNEEZY. JUST RAM, MUSHTAQ AND SHIVAJI

The dwarf isn't a fairy-tale invention, a cartoon character. He's real, he's here and he wants his place in the sun. By **LEANDRE D'SOUZA**

As little children, we learnt of them through the world of fairytales. 'Dwarfs' they were called and there was something magical about them. It seemed as if they belonged to some strange realm called Dwarfdom, a state from which they drew their powers. They mined gold and diamonds in the mountains (as Snow White's seven dwarfs did) or they cheated princesses of their first-borns (as Rumpelstiltskin did). However, once the stories ended, and real dwarfs sprang into focus, they didn't seem quite as interesting. We looked down upon them, literally and metaphorically, with glazed eyes.

We still do.

One obvious source of this, is the stark otherness of the dwarf. Their entirely different physicality can be a threat, an atavistic one, of the kind that makes the herd turn on the albino. Yet it is only a physical condition.

According to eminent endocrinologist Dr. Nadeem Rais, "A person who is small built for his age is regarded as a dwarf. These individuals are medically not 'disabled' unless incapacitated. At every age there is a rough growth pattern

corresponding to weight. How much a person grows with respect to a previous year is termed growth percentile. When less than the fifth percentile he or she would be a dwarf."

It is obvious that the perceptions of the *Grimms' Brothers Fairy Tales* and other such books of literature have remained. We can perhaps blame those forms of literature together with traditional Indian tales, which perpetuate this stereotype. But then, most Indians, educated or otherwise, have failed to proceed beyond this myth. It is preferable to form an exclusive space, comprising those of similar brain-power and physical features. The rest are inconsequential entities -- dirt on a windowpane meant to be scrubbed away, if the condition doesn't do it first.

Skeletal Dysplasia, is the most lethal cause for dwarfism. A person's life span is reduced drastically, he falls prey to every ailment that hits the city as a result of his weak immune system, and he is rendered infertile. "I get tired after I run or walk for a long time," claims Mushtaq, a doorman at a restaurant in Bandra. Though afflicted by it,

Mushtaq and many other dwarfs are unaware of the existence of this debilitating disease. Moreover, science has not progressed in this field so as to provide an 'affordable' cure. Nutritional levels at the formative years of bone growth have a lot to do with dwarfism. Vitamin D deficiency and malnutrition are more common causes.

Subsequently, most of them emerge from the lower rung of the capitalist ladder, they are left with no alternative but to work as doormen in restaurants and as clowns in circuses, in order to survive. Others never venture far away from their homes. Without an exception nearly all of them are subjected to cruel ridicule. Even those who have tried to remain in the mainstream have been driven away sooner or later. "When I stand at the door in the evenings, people humiliate me. They even throw stones," says Mushtaq. His height embarrasses him.

Ram is now a waiter at a restaurant in Santacruz. He remembers the past as a collage of cruelty, mockery and sadism: "With great difficulty, I completed 10 years in school. I abhorred those days -- the last bench, the cruel teachers. The



mockery was traumatic. It frightens me to even think about those days."

In sharp contrast, Shivaji comes across as confident and proud. Seated on a chair, garbed in a kurta, smoking a cigarette and playing casually with a mobile phone, Shivaji responds to questions with casual ease. A clown at the Royal Circus, he considers himself an 'artist'. "I am proud of who and what I am. The ability to make people laugh is an art," he proclaims. Having performed at circuses in Dubai, Kuwait, Singapore, Malaysia and Sharjah, he says that he is at peace as he has been adopted into a 'new family'.

Two extremes are therefore created as dwarfs must either accept the inferior status 'normal' society confers upon them or offer themselves as exhibits in a freakshow.

"Society is based on commonalities, rather than on difference. It is a common perception that you need to be tall and good-looking to achieve anything," says endocrinologist Dr Vaishali "Confidence is a function of your environment. Where you are accepted for what you are, even if it is for being a dwarf, you develop a certain measure of self-esteem. Where being what you are puts you at a

disadvantage, it is difficult not to develop feelings of inferiority."

"We are not different." This is what Shivaji wants to tell his 'brothers'. It is an echo that runs through the dwarf community, a plea for recognition and acceptance in mainstream society. Because these would mean choices. Shivaji might not have chosen to be a clown, were he not a dwarf. And Ram found that his education did not open any doors for him. "After a year of searching I found this job as a waiter," he says. "Now I have been here for 12 years."

Shivaji, Ram, Mushtaq all typify a fundamental presumption that only those who have the skills of the majority will have choices. Unequipped for hard labour -- the last resort of the uneducated -- they find themselves at a disadvantage everywhere. Mr Periera, Manager of the Fellowship of the Physically Handicapped (FPH) states, "Unfortunately their physical defects prevent them from participating in hard labour. We need to find light work for them."

Dilip is an apprentice of the four-year training course that the organisation offers. Having specialised in sorting out and packing safety pins, making caps out of corrugated paper and painting and scrutinising bottle

caps manufactured in Larsen and Toubro, Dilip now has a secure job.

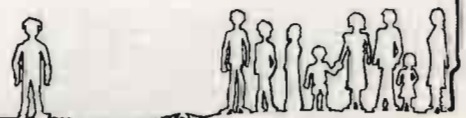
Dilip and Shivaji have found niches for themselves. Thousands of others are still looking.



A deficiency of Vitamin D in a child prior to the formation of bones, is popularly known as rickets. Upon detection, this can be treated and the child can subsequently lead a healthy life. Failure to do so results in disproportionate height. Similarly, it is mandatory that those suffering from Hypothyroidism and Hypoparathyroid consult specialists as periodic medication would prevent deformities from occurring. Malnourished babies, Diabetics and Thalassaemic patients are prone to dwarfism.

The human race is a zone of living things that should be defined by tracing it confine.

- Italo Calvino



GO STRAIGHT TO JAIL

In an age that questions punitive jurisprudence for criminals, we still throw the innocent into prison. Their crime? They're inconvenient because they're mentally ill. RAJYASREE SEN reports on the half-way homes that might be the solution to the woes of the 'non-criminal lunatic'

Banmoti is now 32. Ten years ago, she was deserted by her husband after a year of marriage. Having no one to turn to, she steadily suppressed every memory of her past, till she could not even remember her own name. On February 6, 1989, she was found wandering aimlessly on a street in Calcutta by the police. The police promptly placed her in the lock-up as a solution to the problem of getting her off the streets. For the past 10 years Banmoti, had languished in the Alipore jail, Calcutta. No one questioned her imprisonment. Her case had never come to trial.

By the time Shanara was 10, she had witnessed her father's murder by her brother; she had been deserted at the Bangladesh border by her mother. Shanara subsequently suffered a breakdown and was found wandering aimlessly by the police. She was taken to the lock-up only to be released into the care of the Pavlov Mental Hospital where she spent the next seven years. The Mental Hospital only served to intensify her mental instability instead of alleviating it. It is difficult to get

better when you are locked up in a ward and treated like a prisoner instead of a patient.

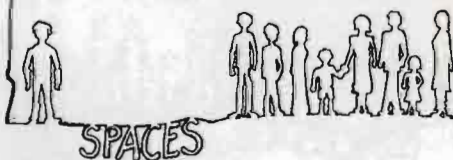
There are many other Banmotis and Shanaras who are being illegally imprisoned at this very moment. These individuals experience imaginary fears, uncontrollable anger, depression and other such mental anguish. Not having a support system they can rely on, they tend to find refuge in a fantasy world where everything is safe and secure. This withdrawal from reality is often the main reason why these individuals are considered to be unstable and sometimes even dangerous. It also makes their return to reality even more painful.

Our mental health care system is rudimentary at best. At it's worst, it is nightmarish: regular electro-convulsive therapy ('shock therapy') takes the place of analysis and pills are seen as a panacea. Very often, these are prescribed and administered by psychiatric social workers whose mandate does not include such services. The government's health care system works in tandem with the legal system: many State-run

asylums and 'mental hospitals' do not accept patients unless the courts so order. This results in a peculiar situation in which the judicial system seems as implicated in the care of the mentally ill as the health care system is

Unable to understand the specific needs of the the mentally ill, the police often lock up the Banmotis and Shanaras. It's a matter of convenience rather than justice: in jail, they are out of sight. If they are released from jail it is only to be placed in mental homes which are even worse than the lock-ups. These individuals illegally imprisoned by the courts are known as non-criminal lunatics.

In 1999, the Supreme Court tried to help. The apex court ruled that no individual may be imprisoned without a trial. Numerous 'half-way' homes have also started working to alleviate the status of these individuals. These homes normally provide a temporary shelter, for around nine months to the inmates. Treatment is offered to the inmates in a secure and friendly environment. This provides them with a safety



net, which allows them to deal with their frustrations and conflict.

According to Dr S N Annamalai, "The only hope for people like Shanara and Banmoti are half-way homes which have come up lately. These half-way homes focus on the psycho-social rehabilitation of the institutionalised mentally ill. They endeavour to reduce their disability and enhance their coping skills so that they can return to a state of daily functioning."

Paripurnata, in Calcutta is a half-way home such as this. It has helped in the repatriation and rehabilitation of both Banmoti and Shanara, among others. Shanara says, "When I was first sent to Paripurnata from Pavlov Mental Hospital I was scared about where I was being sent. I could not make decisions on my own so the doctors took the decision of sending me. After spending nine months here I am leaving to meet my mother."

Like other half-way homes, Paripurnata follows a simple system in rehabilitating their inmates. The inmates are treated as members of an extended family rather than patients. They take part in the daily running of the home. This occupational therapy

helps the inmates grow in self-reliance and helps them in finding jobs for themselves. Psychotherapy and counseling are integral to these half-way homes.

Banmoti, was also rehabilitated through her stay in Paripurnata. She began working with Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a non-governmental organisation working in Masalandpur after undergoing therapy at Paripurnata. "My entire



lack of belief in myself and low self-confidence is a distant memory. I have been working with SEWA for the last two years now. Paripurnata contacted the intelligence bureau in Bangladesh and managed to trace my family. It was due to the counseling that I underwent at Paripurnata that I

became ready to meet my daughter again. I have been living with her for the past year."

Half-way homes also work in coordination with other organisations which help them to contact inmates' families. Organisations in Bangladesh like the Ain-o-Salish Kendra and Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) are a great help in repatriating other non-criminal lunatics.

These half-way homes are a boon to the rehabilitation of these non-criminal lunatics. Banmoti and Shanara are but two of the many individuals neglected by society. Unlike many others the have been lucky enough to have been able to find their way back home. Our lack of understanding of their problems leads us to often look upon them with contempt and treat them with complete disregard. We tend to find these individuals and their deviant behaviour uncomfortable. The government has also, only recently woken up to the plight of these individuals. Half-way homes like Paripurnata and others are laying the foundation stone on which one can only hope society will learn to accept and rehabilitate these individuals rather than shun them. □

Everything great in the world comes from the neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. Never will the world know all it owes to them, nor all they have suffered to enrich us.

- Marcel Proust

*With best wishes
from :*

A Well Wisher

'FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND'

That's the justification most often offered for the 'inhuman' treatment meted out to animals. For how long will we continue to live with the guilt asks **RICHA SHARAN**

The indiscriminate capturing of stray dogs by the BMC has been rampant since 1888. The dogs are detained for three days after which they are killed. Unclaimed dogs are doused with water and then electrocuted. The water is to facilitate the passage of current to 'economise' on energy. The fluctuating current does not kill the dogs instantly. They die slowly nearly 250 dogs of them every day...

Pups below six months are not spared too. They're put into wooden boxes and slowly suffocated to death with chloroform. Pregnant and lactating mothers suffer a similar fate. The method of catching, transporting and detention is absolutely 'inhuman'. Innocent, inattentive dogs are lassoed with chains while they eat from garbage bins. The chains often strangle the frightened dogs, leading to injuries like fractures. The kennels are no better. Stale chappatis and half-eaten biscuits are thrown on the kennel floor, where the dogs also excrete.

These dark and dirty kennels resound with the howls of the animals, waiting to be rescued.

Circus animals suffer similar untold miseries. The housing, transportation, feeding, training

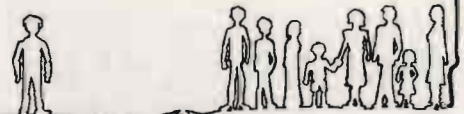


and performance of these animals are steeped in neglect. They are deprived of their natural habitat, made to perform unnatural and dangerous tricks without any consideration for their comfort and needs. They're forced to live in under-sized cages, chained for life and bred to be misused for performances.

Man has over the centuries come to believe that everything in the planet has been created for his use. It is not. "We must stop attaching a price tag or expecting some utility from each and everything around us," says Preeti Gupta of the All India Animal Welfare Association (AIWA).

Each year, millions of animals are experimented upon and sacrificed in the name of research for the 'good of mankind'. Researchers themselves agree that animal studies lead down blind alleys and at best impede progress. Experiments on monkeys led to a misunderstanding of the mechanism of polio vaccine and delayed development of a vaccine for years. Despite this realisation thousands of monkeys and several other species are tortured and sacrificed every year.

A hundred fifty years of drug testing on animals have produced 25 drugs to combat stroke but none work on humans. Mice, rabbits, rats, guinea pigs, ferrets, cats, dogs, sheep, primates, cows



and pigs are common victims. They are deliberately infected with diseases they would never contract under normal circumstances. Force-fed and injected with toxic chemicals, their spines are severed and their bones are broken, so that students can learn to re-join them. Electrodes too, are implanted in their skulls.

Psychologists subject baby animals to maternal deprivation, drug and alcohol addiction, brain damage and other torments - all for the 'good of mankind'. Chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturers, hospital, universities and cosmetic companies conduct most animal experiments. Even the military uses animals to see what effect radiation, bullet wounds and chemical warfare agents have on living bodies, even though the results on humans are well documented.

"We need to understand that nature works in dependance with man and that every animal on this planet is not there for us to exploit," asserts Gupta. But economic forces dominate in today's world and such pleas fall on deaf ears.

Thousands of cattle go through daily routines of torture by their owners. The owner milks the

cows early in the morning, after he has injected a chemical, oxytocin, to maximise the amount of milk from the animal. Her calf, if female, is given a little time to suckle the mother, but the male calf is never fed on the mother. In fact, he is tied with a tight leash in a corner till the butcher can come and fetch him for slaughter to a legal or illegal slaughterhouse, to be sold as tender veal, and the skin is to be processed to calf leather.

After milking the cow dry, she is rented to beggars outside temples. After mid-day the cow is left loose to go and rummage in the municipal waste bins. In the evening the cows are milked again. The milkman makes 100 per cent profit with no investment of his own. And when the cow ceases to give milk, she is sold off to the nearest butcher.

Jigeesha Thakur, secretary, AIAWA, says, "Every species has its own problem and they all need human intervention in a positive way. It's inevitable for us to look after them because they can survive on their own but we can't without them. Our attitude of something not of use not being fit for survival needs a change."

For a country where the cow is venerated and which takes pride in propagating the principles of

non-violence and which includes in its fundamental duties of the Constitution compassion to animals, surely, this is not what we hoped for. A lot can be done for animals to get their rightful place in society.

Help has started trickling in, but as late as in 1994. Disturbed by the merciless decimation of thousands of dogs Maneka Gandhi, various other animal organisations and animal lovers approached the then Additional Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai, Sudha Bhave, with the suggestion to start sterilising dogs rather than killing them. She accepted the request and since then the killings have apparently stopped in Mumbai but rampant everywhere else.

Organisations such as 'People for Animals' and 'Beauty without Cruelty' are doing their bit to protect animals and generate awareness about the need to stop cruelty on animals. 'Ahimsa' came to the rescue of infirm lionesses that were being forced to perform in circuses despite being blind. The Government finally banned the training of five species - lions, tigers, panthers, bears and monkeys - for circuses.

Despite warnings against killing endangered wild animals, they too are not being spared.



Elephants and rhinos continue to be ruthlessly hunted for their tusks. The tiger is on the brink of extinction. The cheetah finally gave up the ghost soon after independence when its habitat was ruthlessly converted to human use. And no one has any idea how many lesser known species we've lost post independence under the combined offensive of shikaris and timber merchants.

The animals' only legal protection, the Prevention to Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, offers little solace. Though it prohibits poaching, it is ineffective more often than not. The act needs to be drastically amended, as the fines and

penalties meted out are so negligible that they make a mockery out of the law rather than act as a deterrent. The fines imposed by the act are as low as ten rupees for various acts of cruelty and exploitation.

Despite a world-wide ban on the hunting of the Tibetan antelope or chiru, shahtoosh shawls made from its fleece, continue to be a craze among high society and even politicians like the Scindias and Sonia Gandhi use these shawls. Each shahtoosh shawl is equivalent to four Chiru lives but is touted as the 'ultimate cult accessory'.

If man places himself at the apex of the animal kingdom, then

it is his moral responsibility to look after the 'lesser beings'. For they can very well do without us. But can we?

As Byron wrote on the gravestone of his dog, and whose words ring true for all animals-

"Beauty without vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,

And all the virtues of man
without the vices." □

Considering there are only 70,000 chirus left in the world, there are only 15,000 shawls to be made. Celebrities like Paul McCartney, even wear underwear made out of toosh!

They were always there,
 From the very beginning,
 Watching me closely.
 Their unblinking eyes followed me everywhere.
 I could never escape
 Their scrutiny.
 Then, one day, without any warning
 They threw me out
 And shut all the doors of the world
 And shoved me into the dark.
 They said I was different,
 I did not belong

The dark and me
 We soon became friends
 Yet shapes of faces --
 Memories of the world
 Danced in the stillness.
 Sounds once familiar
 Buzzed mosquito-like
 In my ears
 Somewhere deep down
 Though I resisted hard, a longing arose.

Then, suddenly,
 The doors were broken open
 I was blinded
 By the rush of light
 Hope raised its sleepy head
 But dropped it
 Almost immediately
 I was dragged into their world.
 They turned on harsh lights
 And pushed me into the centre of it
 "Stand erect" they said
 Then they pointed and spoke
 In loud, learned whispers.
 "Turn left", "Turn right"
 "Look up, "Look down"

They left
 And I stayed
 In the space
 Where the spotlights
 Had made their circle.
 I was alone again.
 I was different

— *Raji Mary Chacko*



