

## INTRODUCTION

If you were to lay a map of India over a map of the United States, it would easily cover the land from Maine to Florida, everything east of the Mississippi, plus Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri. Depending on how you manipulate your map, you might include a chunk of Texas as well. If you were to lay a map of the southeastern United States over a map of Europe, it would cover most of Western Europe, excluding Scandinavia. In reading European literatures from a U.S. perspective, we tend to see them in nationalist terms—German literature differing from British literature, French from Italian, etc. India, though politically unified, is at least as culturally diverse as Europe, and more marked in regional and linguistic variation; yet in reading literature from India, we again tend to subsume regional differences under a nationalist framework. The contours of this mental map were laid down in the colonial period and recast in the nationalism of the twentieth century. The mental map impacts Indian writers as well as North American readers. Most North American readers note the similarities among Indian writers or, indeed, take Indian writers of the diaspora who first publish in English in Britain and North America as representative. This collection of stories by contemporary Indian women writers defines the accomplishments of contemporary Indian fiction by almost exclusively selecting stories written in India and by representing many regions of the subcontinent.

As in the United States, in India regional differences are marked by important divergences in art, cultural life, social organization, religion, and attitudes about gender and family. As in the United States, but even more significantly, the gap between rural and urban cultures creates a second set of differences. And unlike the American literature, Indian literature—or I should say literatures—is marked by a multiplicity of languages. This anthology of stories is remarkable for representing differences of language and region and for including a variety of settings from urban, to village, to rural. The stories here—powerful evocations of women’s lives and imaginations—are translated from Bangla, Kannada, Telugu, Assamese, Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, and Gujarati. Two of the stories were written in English, and four have been translated by their authors.

Among recent collections of Indian short stories—those by women and those by both women and men—*Separate Journeys* is remarkable for its linguistic and regional variety. While no slender volume could possibly represent fully the diversity of women’s writing in India, this collection, published jointly by StreeKatha and Garutmän in Calcutta, represents both a significant effort at collecting fine stories and an achievement in translation.

Both Garutmän and Katha—the parent of StreeKatha—are organizations formed to promote translation. Garutmän is a publishing house with a special mission to foster a community of translators of Indian languages and to provide them with assistance, with translation workshops, and with editing and distribution of translations. It co-publishes books on a nonprofit basis. Garutmän aims to “overcome the main hurdles in transcultural communication.” StreeKatha is the publishing imprint of the nonprofit organization Katha, whose mission is to “spread the love of books and the joy of reading amongst children and adults, with activities spanning literacy and literature.” Katha was founded with a commitment to provide high quality material for “neo-literate” children and adults in India—and to provide interactive books on women’s issues in a variety of Indian languages. It also publishes magazines, pamphlets, and book series for newly literate readers, especially women and children, and provides assistance to working children and income-generating programs for poor women. *Separate Journeys* obviously owes much to Katha’s dedication to improving the lives and literacy of families. Several of these stories give us a strong sense of the day-to-day lives of the poor or illiterate. This volume was one of the first published by what became Katha Vilasam, Katha’s Story Research and Resource Centre, which is dedicated to fostering fiction in the regional languages of India and facilitating its translation. Katha Vilasam has grown into a vibrant organization since *Separate Journeys* was first conceived. It sponsors awards for fiction and for translation, and works with teachers and students in activities related to translation.

The complex publishing history of this anthology demonstrates clearly that English language publishing in India is often a global affair. *Separate Journeys* was originally planned in 1986 as a response to the theme of the Frankfurt Book Fair, “India: Change in Continuity.” In Frankfurt, Garutmän arranged podium discussions with several authors invited from India. By 1993 the story collection was ready for publication and appeared in collaboration with India Book Distributor. The original collection had twenty-three stories. The collection was simultaneously published in London by Mantra Publishing Ltd., in an altered version. Ten of the original stories were dropped in this edition and two were added. The volume was so well received that a second Indian edition was called for. This volume appeared as a joint Katha-Garutmän publication in 1998.

The Katha-Garutmān text is the basis for this edition published by the University of South Carolina Press. In the Katha-Garutmān edition fifteen stories were included. The two stories that had been added for the Mantra edition published in London were dropped (“I Am Not Like That” by Veena Seshadri and “The Green Frock” by Charan Jit Kaur), and eight stories of the original twenty-three were also omitted (“Subhasini” by Geeta Dharmarajan; “In and Out of Parenthesis,” by Saroj Pathak; “Steps,” by Manjul Bhagat; “Bliss,” by Abori Chhaya Devi; “The Sky and Hill,” by Vasundhara Devi; “Stench of Kerosene,” by Amrita Preetam; “Two Hands,” by Ismat Chughtai; and “Lukose Church,” by Susan Vishwanath).

This first U.S. edition, then, represents the fourth edition of *Separate Journeys*, following two Indian editions and one U.K. edition. While the words of the translated texts remain substantially the same across editions, the shifting contexts for reading are themselves significant. For most readers in the United States, these stories may well appear “Indian”; to readers in Calcutta, where they were published for Indian readers, they would appear regionally varied, distinct, and full of possible losses in translation. Obvious differences, manifest in close-up, tend to disappear with distance. This phenomenon has been described in personal terms by the writer Lakshmi Kannan, author of *India Gate and Other Stories* and *Parijata and Other Stories*, who writes in Tamil and in English, and who translates her own Tamil stories into English. In a recent interview, Kannan recounted her response to this crossing cultures: “If you go into an international setting, you realise that India is greatly respected. It is not respected for its anglicized aspect, rather it is respected for its Indianness. This is the paradox that hits you, and it amuses you when you are there, because when you come back to India there are people bending backwards to show the West that they are as good as they are. . . . The artistic lot in the international community are very drawn to Indianness. The stories that get anthologized abroad are the stories that are very ethnic” (Dhawan, 50). The “ethnicity” international readers seek is almost by definition an ethnicity constituted by generalized cultural tropes and by the international market for contemporary Indian fiction. Witness the genesis of this collection in the planning for the Frankfurt Book Fair.

International readers have come to recognize the power of such writers as Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Meena Alexander, and Vikram Seth—wherever their work may first be published. Their fiction, like the stories collected here, may feed what Gayatri Spivak has called a “transnational U.S. multicultural hunger.” “Multicultural hunger” is both a good thing—it allows one to see how large the world truly is—and a not-so-good thing. It can also create what, especially as we valorize ethnicity or gender, Spivak calls a “mask of untheorized solidarity”

(xxiv, xxxvi). The stories collected here, because of their variety, may allow the North American reader to resist an easy “multiculturalism” by recognizing the complex interplay of gender, language, and culture. Geeta Dharmarajan, the editor from StreeKatha, argues that these stories allow us to understand a “self that hovers / in between / is neither man / nor woman” (xxvii). For the North American reader, an additional in-between is the cultural in-between, the place where we identify what is shared and the differences that difference makes. For Dharmarajan, each author and character, and ultimately each reader, makes a separate journey. The geography of those journeys depends very much upon one’s starting place.

*Separate Journeys* operates for its North American readers in two registers of “multiculturalism.” Its local register—as it gathers stories from across the Indian subcontinent translated from a variety of languages—may be considered analogous to regionalism in the United States. The collection and translation of stories from several languages creates a sense of regional and cultural difference. Moreover the choice of stories—particularly the attention to tribal peoples and people of scheduled castes—works toward a regional, linguistic, ethnic, and class-based representativeness much like that attempted in many anthologies of women’s writing from North America. Like these anthologies, *Separate Journeys* addresses communalism (sectarian/religious differences) and social injustice in its own national context by crossing divides of language, religion, gender, and social class. The anthology begins with Mahasweta Devi’s story “Bayen,” about a low-caste woman, whose caste-assigned job is to bury children who are not old enough for cremation. Chandi is declared a bayen, or witch, when, after she is blamed unjustly for the death of her niece, she is no longer able to bury children and guard the burial ground. She begins to hallucinate, pressed by the intolerable burden of her inherited, culturally assigned job and what would appear to be postpartum depression. The villagers, including her drunken husband, respond by declaring her a bayen and casting her out. Devi’s story, translated from the Bangla, is kin to those by Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Kamala Das in its empathy with and representation of combined class/caste and gendered differences. Mamoni Raisom Goswami’s story, “The Empty Chest,” translated from the Assamese, brings us again to the degradation associated in India with handling the dead: Toradoi has served in the house of the zamindar, or land/estate owner, and has “given herself” to his son who, forbidden to marry her, dies years later in an accident. By this time Toradoi’s husband is jailed for a drunken accident and her sons go hungry. She scavenges from the cremation ground the chest that contained her former lover’s body in a futile attempt to undo the damage that is her life. Kamala Das’s story, “The Hijra,” translated from the Malayalam, centers on a Gujarati woman who has lost her transgendered

daughter. The daughter, the story implies, was sold by her paternal grandmother and her father to the hijras (transvestites, eunuchs, and transgendered people who act as prostitutes and, in rituals, confer fertility and prosperity on houses to which male children are born). Seeking the girl years later, her mother cannot recognize her, despite her beauty and her birthmark, for the girl, now grown, lives a foreign—and in its way disreputable—life. The old woman, guided by blue lights of the railway station, returns toward her home, at the ominous English address—Warden Road. These three stories along with others in the collection create a broad frame of reference for North American readers. Regional, class, caste, and gendered differences, especially in contrast to stories of middle-class life, resist homogenization of the “other culture.”

A second register in which this collection operates is the register of international “multiculturalism”—those necessarily simplified notions of national identity or ethnicity Kannan and Spivak identify. Yet the regional, cultural, class, and ethnic differences represented in this anthology also give North American readers ample opportunity to resist simplification. A story like “The Hijra” resonates by raising the question of how cultures “place” those who do not fit dualistic definitions of sex and gender.

### **Found in Translation**

Despite the variety of stories and original languages represented in *Separate Journeys*, monolingual Americans may still not be able easily to recognize what is lost in translation. In her edited collection of stories by Indian women, Lakshmi Holmström points to the potential loss of nuance in translation—citing, for example, the way the terseness of Tamil grammatical structure is difficult to render in English, or the way English lacks single words to differentiate between a mother’s sister and a mother’s brother’s wife. Such differences may have the effect for international readers of flattening the nuances of geography or of domestic space (Holmström, xvi).

The choice to publish these stories in English appears a matter of course to us in North America. For English speakers in North America, “translation” simply means translation into English. In India the choice of English is logical but more complex, more ideologically fraught. The issues of translation have been put most succinctly by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita in their introduction to *Women Writing in India* (published in two volumes by the Feminist Press in 1993). They characterize translation as a collision of worlds, often unequal worlds at that. In their own anthology of texts from eleven languages and as many centuries, they acknowledge: “We have been very aware that in India, when we translate a regional language—Tamil or Oriya, for instance—into English, we are representing a regional culture for a more powerful national or ‘Indian’ one, and when this translation is made available to a readership outside India,

we are also representing a national culture for a still more powerful international culture—which is today, in effect, a Western one” (2:xx).

Geeta Dharmarajan, the editor of *Separate Journeys*, embarked on a quest similar to Tharu and Lalita’s, seeking stories in many languages. She says in her introduction to this volume that when she assembled the translations, she “understood all over again how difficult it is to clump all literature produced in India or by Indians under the umbrella statement ‘Indian.’ The term itself is so deliciously vague and comprises so many regions, so many varied cultures, so many styles and traditions of writing. The tradition that a writer in Urdu instinctively knows and adopts is most probably unknown to her counterpart in Karnataka who weaves her story in Kannada” (xxviii). Despite its difficulties, the need for translation is urgent, for, as Dharmarajan notes, the speaker of Urdu may well be unable to read Kannada and vice versa. Even as English provides global readers access to these stories, so too it serves as an important link language among readers in India.

Whatever power differentials may be operating, normally we think of translation as occurring between a source and a target language, with the target language being the vernacular of the intended readers. English in India is more complex. Linguists often make a further distinction between vernacular and vehicular languages—the vernacular being the spoken language, the vehicular used for communication among speakers of different vernaculars, as nineteenth-century French or medieval Latin was used for diplomatic purposes. Indian English has a shifting status as both a vernacular and a vehicular language. As one of three languages in which pan-Indian literature is written, or into which it is translated—the others being Hindi and Sanskrit—English serves as a vehicular language, a means of moving information, creative materials, etc., between languages (Kachru, 69). For some Indian writers, however, English is not a vehicular language but one, sometimes one of several, mother tongues.

Responding to the social complexities of Indian English, editors of Indian fiction in recent years have taken various approaches to the issue of translation. The most inflammatory position is certainly the simplest—choose English. Remind your readers that for some Indian writers, both in India and in the diaspora, English is a mother or at least another mother tongue. The strongest version of this position is surely Salman Rushdie’s claim in introducing the anthology *Mirrorwork: Fifty Years of Indian Writing, 1947–1997* (1997), that “prose writing—both fiction and non-fiction—created in this period by Indian writers *working in English* is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called ‘vernacular languages,’ during the same time; and, indeed, this new and still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world

of books" (viii). Obviously this statement has been inflammatory enough to draw down yet another controversy upon Rushdie's oft controversial head. While Rushdie and Elizabeth West's anthology does make for some very fine reading, collections such as *Separate Journeys* or Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India* make clear Rushdie's assessment leaves something to be desired and much unsaid. Rushdie evaluates the contemporary canon but does not attempt to speak for the archival recovery work represented in Tharu and Lalita's volumes.

Sweeping judgments of literary merit have the virtue of being impossible to prove or disprove. Rushdie's judgment, though, does reveal one kind of position, that of the writer who is born and/or educated to English in India and abroad. Perhaps we could characterize the "language position" of a writer (or a translator) in the same way feminist critics characterize her or his "subject position"; from this perspective a language position would be a social location partially defined by language as it intersects with class, education, gender, region, and the constitution of national subjects. For some writers in India or the diaspora—like Rushdie—English serves as a vernacular. For others, it is a mother other tongue—not spoken at home most of the time but occasionally—and read and spoken at school. For still others it is an acquisition of a second and not-quite-foreign language, still further removed from a language or languages spoken at home. Moreover, whatever a writer's languages, the judgments made about language, translation, and the status of English are intimately tied to positions about nation. In surveying postcolonial critics' positions on issues of translation, Douglas Robinson marks a distinction between postcolonial theorists who "celebrate hybridity" and thus view translation in a "utopian light, as a channel of resistance and self-preservation," and those "drawn to a vision of precolonial paradise and the evils of empire," who are more likely to "demonize" translation (95).

The editors of *Separate Journeys* and other collections of writing by Indian women inhabit a middle ground. A feminist approach to Indian culture before independence is unlikely to result in a "vision of a precolonial paradise," and for women in postcolonial India "hybridity" figures more often as a narrative of displacement than as a utopian condition. For, as in the discourses of race and gender in the United States, women in India are complexly situated in the discourses of nationalism and gender. Tharu and Lalita argue that the processes of Indian nationalism resulted in another kind of translation—the translation of "heterogeneous articulations" of cultural forms into a new form of authority, essentially "upper-caste, middle-class, and male point of view of the agent-state" (57). In this new articulation and in traditional culture, women, and particularly feminists, are always already other. Translation from various vernaculars into English, in consequence, is seen in a nuanced way—as neither

intrinsically positive nor intrinsically a capitulation to Western authority. Rather, translation may serve to create what Spivak would call a theorized solidarity among women.

*Separate Journeys*, unlike *Mirrorwork*, represents the work of writers in the vernacular languages of India and those, like Kamala Das, who write or translate in more than one language. For many of these writers, the “language position” is complex—dependent on schooling, home, region, and the subtle processes of thought and imagination created by these factors. A vivid account of the kind of linguistic complexity taken for granted by Indian writers, including many in this collection, is provided by Shashi Deshpande, one of the best known women writers in India. Replying to questions about her decision to write in English, Deshpande gives the following account of her childhood: “Ours was by no means a Westernized household. Apart from the fact that we lived in a small town, in a middle class family, there was the fact that my father taught Sanskrit in college, he wrote in Kannada, read English and had married a Marathi wife. Home was a harmonious mix of languages. Kalidas and Bhavabhuti, Shivaram Karanth and Masti Venkatesh Iyengar were names as familiar as Ibsen and Shaw. And if in school we did Wordsworth and Tennyson, at home we had to learn the *Amarkosha* by heart. Nevertheless, all reading was in English.” Deshpande goes on to describe her regret at feeling cut off “from my own language and literature.” Though she taught herself to read Kannada and Marathi, nonetheless “English was and remained the language of my thinking, it was and is the language in which I expressed myself” (Jain, 30–31). Deshpande acknowledges that readers often ask why she writes in English and that, whatever her answer, the exchange is always ideologically fraught. English is both her own language—“the language of my thinking”—and understood as paradoxically not her own. She does not claim the same relationship to English that she believes her father had to Kannada or her mother to Marathi.

The paradox then for Indian readers, writers, and translators, lies precisely in the “owning” of English as a language for writing or translation. Rushdie claims outright ownership and the right to experimentation that goes with it. For Deshpande and others ownership is more difficult but still crucial. As the linguist Braj Kachru argues, “using a non-native language in native context to portray new themes, characters, and situations is like redefining the semantic and semiotic potential of a language, making language mean something which is not part of its traditional ‘meaning.’ It is an attempt to give a new African or Asian identity, and thus an extra dimension of meaning. A part of that dimension perhaps remains obscure or mysterious to the Western reader” (317). This process of creating new meanings in English, for those who write in two languages or translate their own work, like Mrinal Pande, Kamala Das, Quratulain Hyder, and Varsha Das in this volume, is a process of transcreation

(Kachru, 319). The creation of new meanings accompanies the creation of new identities.

Those of us who cannot read these stories in the original languages can see only some of the decisions translators have made, word by word, to make these stories available to Indian and then to global audiences. As the editor, Geeta Dharmarajan, puts it, these stories are woven into “something that looks whole to the outsider who does not see the warp and woof” (xxviii). Perhaps the warp and woof of Indian cultures and languages are most visible in a text like Mrinal Pande’s “A Kind of Love Story.” Here Pande has translated her own story from Hindi, making judicious choices about which words to translate, which few to leave transliterated, and which to explain. Pande’s main character, Madhusudan Babu, spends his life avoiding life, having learned from his teacher of classical Indian music—a man with three wives—to avoid the company of women. Pande’s story turns on delicate, though searing, irony as Madhusudan, now an old misanthrope, falls in a kind of love. Madhusudan’s teacher, he believes, experienced music as a *siddhi*, a spiritual accomplishment, which he should have passed on in some measure to his student. The gift is wasted, if indeed it ever existed at all, and when Madhusudan has the opportunity to share it and the lives of others, he resorts to lies to win affection. So much for music as *siddhi*. Madhusudan ends in his local temple, ironically, “listening to holy chants.” Pande’s delicate choices in translation allow her English-speaking readers both at home and abroad to experience the ironies at this intersection of traditional culture, art, and misogyny. The languages of classical music and religion move into English only partially, most often transliterated rather than explained; the vocabulary of music retains its specificity. In the process we see the distance between musical skill and the spirit of religious music, between *siddhi* as discipline and personal rigidity.

Pande takes “the reader to the author” or to the author’s culture, asking us to appreciate musical intricacies; Anita Desai “takes the author to the reader,” that is, she gives the monolingual English reader a great deal of information (Robinson, 1). In one of the two stories in *Separate Journeys* that were originally written in English, Desai’s “Private Tuition with Mr. Bose,” the teaching of literature is of central concern. Yet Desai’s story represents body language as the most eloquent communication of all. (For American readers, it is useful to know that “tuition” in Indian English means lessons or tutoring, not school fees.) On his balcony in Calcutta Mr. Bose tutors reluctant teenagers in Sanskrit and Bangla poetry. The boy who, supposedly, studies Sanskrit is surly; the girl tortures him. In response to his discomfiture, Mr. Bose’s wife speaks with her hands, rattling pots and pans, making purees in the kitchen. Desai captures the ridiculous: “He had quite forgotten that his next pupil, this Wednesday, was to be Upneet . . . this once-a-week typhoon, Upneet of the floral sari, ruby

earrings and shaming laughter. Under this Upneet's gaze such ordinary functions of a tutor's life as sitting down at a table, sharpening a pencil . . . became matters of farce, disaster and hilarity. . . . Throwing away the Sanskrit books, bringing out volumes of Bangla poetry, opening to a poem by Jibanandan Das, he wondered ferociously: Why did she come? What use had she for Bangla poetry? Why did she come from that house across the road where the loud radio rollicked, to sit on his balcony, in view of his shy wife, making him read poetry to her? It was intolerable. Intolerable, all of it—except, only for the seventy-five rupees paid at the end of the month. Oranges, he thought grimly, and milk, medicines, clothes. And he read to her.” For the next half hour Upneet tortures her tutor, swinging her foot in rhythm, lifting the hem of her sari as he reads to her the Bangla poetry he had once copied out for his wife. The “two halves of the difficult world that he had been holding so carefully together, sealing them with reams of poetry, reams of Sanskrit” split apart “into dissonance.” Desai's English captures the rhythms of poetry (which she translates) and the rhythms of the silence between Mr. Bose and Upneet, Mr. Bose and his nameless wife. By narrating small actions and bodily dispositions Desai conveys the wife's irritation and the couple's silent affection. Finally the “grammar” between wife and husband rearranges itself. Desai's English rhythms match the rhythms of domestic activity. Mr. Bose's multiple languages are less important than the rhythms of the body and the wordless language and even the small talk of daily life.

Both of these stories examine the intersections of traditional high culture and gender; in both stories, traditional arts only seem to hold together the worlds of domesticity and learning. In these as in other stories in this volume, the grammar of tradition alone does not make for happiness. Translation operates in the messy present, not in an imagined precolonial paradise or a putative hybrid utopia. Dissonance, as William Carlos Williams famously said, leads to discovery.

## **Women Writers**

### ***Gender and Nation***

The stories in *Separate Journeys* represent different languages, posing literal problems of translation. They also represent the problematics of translation in a more figurative way—as gender and sexuality are made to stand in for, to represent, or to translate new political and economic realities. Historians of Indian women's writing in the twentieth century connect it to the history of Indian feminism, tracing the relationship between women's movements in India to other political movements, especially nationalism, and to innovations in literary theme and form. While a recapitulation of this history is beyond the scope of an introduction like this one, I want to suggest briefly how the stories

in *Separate Journeys* do represent these larger cultural trends. In their monograph-length introduction to the two volumes of *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita outline the importance for twentieth-century women writers of the high nationalism of the Swadeshi movement, the liberalism of national women's organizations that developed out of earlier reform movements focused on women's education and social and legal position, and the socialist commitments of women involved in the Progressive Writers' Association in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Swadeshi movement, valorizing what was of "of one's own country" as opposed to goods imported literally or intellectually from the colonial ruler and other Western powers, created new meanings of everyday life, reformulating nationalism in terms of "authentic Indianness," and making gender crucial to this Indianness (Tharu and Lalita, 73). Tharu and Lalita identify the figure of the traditional Hindu upper-caste and middle-class grandmother as the embodiment of tradition, one who remakes, contains, and continues tradition however "secular" it may look through the century. Not surprisingly *Separate Journeys* begins with just such a figure. Geeta Dharmarajan begins with a tale of her own storytelling grandmother who fed her fascinated grandchildren snacks of rice and sambar as they listened to her stories.

In addition to the definitions of gender and nation constituted through the Swadeshi movement, national women's organizations also contributed to fiction writing by women in numerous ways—through political activity, as well as agitation around issues that had been debated since the nineteenth century, including most notably, education, dowry, child marriage, purdah, and the prohibition of widow remarriage (Tharu and Lalita, 84). Lakshmi Holmström and other critics have shown how these issues formed both fiction and autobiography in the last century-and-a-half. Holmström cites as precedents for work emerging from twentieth-century women's organizations such texts from the nineteenth century as Ramabai Saraswati's *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* and Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Saguna*. "New-Woman" writing from the turn of the century, like Krupabai's two books, began a tradition carried on in the 1910s and 1920s (Forbes, Lokugé), when in concert with nationalist struggles the emphasis shifted from social reforms to the franchise (Tharu and Lalita, 85). By the 1930s in the nationalist struggle, women's issues were often subsumed under the terms of liberal nationalism, in much the same way, ironically, that women's insistence on the franchise took a backseat to male working-class struggles for political and economic power in nineteenth-century Britain (for details of liberal nationalism, see Forbes and Tharu and Lalita, 88).

A different strain of feminism and writing by women in the years before and during the Second World War was associated with the more radical socialist program of the Progressive Writers' Associations, which formed all over

the country. Of the writers represented in *Separate Journeys* both Mahasweta Devi and Anupama Niranjana were active in the PWAs. The PWAs opposed both fascism and imperialism. Out of this movement also came an active theater movement that was significant for many women writers, a commitment still important for Mahasweta Devi. In the immediate postwar years the PWA lost much of its strength.

A second wave of the twentieth-century women's movement, however, helped shape writing by women in the 1970s. The Emergency, 1975–77, with its curtailment of freedoms and other repressive measures, catalyzed various forms of resistance. Women became radicalized, working in trade unions, cooperatives, organizations of slum dwellers and tribal peoples (Holmström). As in the reformist women's movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the new movements of the 1970s and since, representation of poverty and of tribal peoples could be a radical force for social change, or it could consolidate ideology around an image of rural India presented from a middle-class perspective. Just as the Swadeshi movement and reformist tendencies in the women's movement allowed women to be assimilated to a traditionalist (and implicitly Hindu) ideology, so too could work arising from the second wave of twentieth-century feminism in India. Urmila Pawar's story, translated here from the Marathi, perhaps comes closest to this kind of ideological representation of rural India. Pawar's story, "Justice," however manages to skirt the temptations of representing the rural simplistically from a middle-class point of view by ironizing the prejudices of the city-dwelling narrator. The heroine of the story (of course named Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya, perfect consort, and a form of the mother goddess Devi) defends motherhood, assumes she bears a son, and speaks up for herself in a way that would seem to personify rural Indian virtues. The narration could also be said to be yet another treatment of the plight of the young widow. But Urmila Pawar frames the story through the middle-class consciousness of the male city-dwelling narrator, who comes to grips with his own past. The narrator's contempt for the countryside and his natal village could be translated on an ideological register into contempt for India—but also contempt for the lower classes. Parvati's courage and forthrightness teach him a lesson. The ironic reverberations of the story's ending allow the complexities of rural/urban, upper-/lower-class relationships to surface and to create dissonance, though such ironies never call into question Parvati's paradigmatic status.

Ashapura Devi's story "Izzat" similarly uses a narrative framing device that allows the author to foreground the problems of the middle class by representing the experiences of working-class women. In Devi's story Basanti, a maid-servant, pleads with her old mistress to protect the honor of her daughter, who

is being harassed by rough men in her neighborhood. Sumitra, the mistress, finally agrees, only to realize that her husband forbids it. The beautiful but poor daughter becomes sexual prey, but Sumitra finds herself powerless to protect her. Set in Calcutta, the story turns on the middle-class dilemma of Sumitra and, without overtly minimizing Basanti's suffering, draws parallels between her helplessness and Sumitra's own. Basanti assures Sumitra that in her comfortable home she is "queen," but Sumitra soon learns that her power is only nominal. Without Basanti's daughter's anger, the story would rest wholly within the problematics of middle-class life. The girl—a teenager who says what she thinks—makes her own clear-eyed judgments about patronizing the poor, but the story focuses on Sumitra's potential awakening to the limitations of her own position. One is reminded of southern U.S. stories of white middle-class characters awakening to the realities of racism—racism understood from what the white characters perceive to be the "center."

Recent stories about tribal people and stories that create glimpses of a utopian vision through fantasy or a kind of magical realism resist both the submerged communalism implied in the figure of the Hindu grandmother and liberal narratives of nationalism as well. Among the most powerful stories in this collection, Devi's "Bayen" evokes a community apart from, and yet obliquely dependent on, the wider world, a community where children are not vaccinated and tradition holds little protection for any woman who steps out of her assigned place, however intolerable it might be. Chandidasi, the servant of the burial ground, experiences the weight of tradition in her body, her mother's milk. Cast out and turned into a pariah, driven mad by isolation, she dies in an almost surreal attempt to prevent a train wreck. Swallowed in the train's light, Chandi dies to become, ironically, a hero in death. Distances of caste and gender, rural and urban are never bridged.

Other stories in this volume embrace experimental approaches to psyche and culture. "I," by Jeelani Bano, explores the fractured inner world of a boy who, for reasons unclear, cannot believe himself to be the child of his own mother. The mother-son dyad is repeatedly ruptured as the son takes literally every figurative pronouncement, every remark like "this crying child cannot be mine." Amir, who seems to be a favored son of a relatively fortunate family, cannot overcome the psychological place of the orphan. Again, trains figure as emblems of modernity. The train marks Amir's sense of division from self and family. Interestingly, it is the son, who need not necessarily leave home, rather than a daughter, who experiences loss of self and family. Modernity itself is equated with the boy's inability to recognize his mother, his sisters, or his own identity.

## The Art of Story

### *Feminist Recasting of Oral and Poetic Traditions*

The great majority of stories here represent the dominant tradition in twentieth-century Indian as well as in English fiction: realism. The well-crafted tale turns usually on a single incident and implies a wider network of social and psychological relationships. “Bayen” and “I” push the edges of these conventions, the first drawing on elements of folk tradition and the second on modernist stream of consciousness. Other stories in the collection, notably “The Sermons of Haji Gul Baba Bektashi” owe much to very different oral traditions. Almost a Sufi tall tale, Qurratulain Hyder’s work reminds us that Urdu traditions are also among the rich sources of story in Indian culture. Oral tradition and poetry form the context for other stories as well.

The final story in the collection is something of a prose poem and perhaps also a political allegory. Varsha Das’s story, translated by the author under the title “I Am Complete,” is the most direct treatment of women’s sensual experience in a collection that is relatively reticent on the topic. The speaker of the story is freed, from what we do not know—prison, marriage? She remembers a now lost lover but is rescued from longing as the sky showers its own affection on her, caressing her, admonishing her that such a love would have turned to hatred. Achieving freedom through the earth’s motherly intervention, the speaker becomes serene: “If I open my arms I can embrace the whole universe. I am complete.”

A similar, but less optimistic representation of wholeness comes in “The Widows of Tithoor.” Perhaps the most complexly experimental story in *Separate Journeys*, it is also the only one to deal directly with India before independence. Viswapria L. Iyengar’s work creates a glimpse of an imagined resistance to both patriarchal and imperialist structures of power. “The Widows of Tithoor” is among the most haunting in the collection, and indeed it is about haunting. We discover that the Collector, a colonial official—one of the White Ghosts—seems to be responsible for the death of a local widow, who, like the bayen, is so marginalized as to be thought a witch. He has declared the widow Haldi a subversive because she has created her own religious ritual for local widows—found her own solution to the “problem” of the Hindu widow as the British conceived it. And she is suspect too because she has been seen with “Veerappa, the rebel leader from Pithoor.” By shaping point of view and creating an elaborate interweaving of narrative times, Viswapria Iyengar makes Haldi a legend and creator of legends, something between a priest and a goddess. Under Haldi’s direction, the widows’ newfound freedom, value, sensual life, and community form a utopian moment of resistance within repressive regimes of power. In the end, Haldi’s religious community has no temple, no



Seeing the feet of the master,  
O lord white as jasmine,  
I was made  
worthwhile.  
(Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, 118)

In this beautiful translation, A. K. Ramanujan captures the poet's search for this world's pleasure and the way to another, for the balance she achieves in the final lines, "I was made / worthwhile." Iyengar's imagined ritual transforms this sense of completion to self-completion: "I am bride unto myself."

The writers in *Separate Journeys* take the quest for wholeness into the worlds of middle-class domesticity, poverty, violence, and colonial history. They work through various languages and literary traditions. They embrace divergent literary conventions, ranging from realism to didactic fiction to stream of consciousness and experimental tales. They reach out to worlds both local and global. It will be exciting to see in the twenty-first century what worlds walk back toward them.

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