

Harjeet Singh Gill: *Heer Ranjha and Other Legends of the Punjab* (New Delhi: Harnam Publishing House, 2003), 157 pp., 5 plates. (hb) Rs.600. ISBN 81-8662-60-8.

Through a complex process of appropriation and reworking extending over several centuries, the Hir-Ranjha story and the other great romantic legends of the Punjab have come to lie at the heart of the region's cultural landscape. As defining myths with a continuing wide and special appeal on both sides of the international frontier, they keep proving themselves as enduringly capable of intellectual analysis and artistic depiction as they have been of repeated renewal through reiteration and retelling in words, not only in Punjabi but also formerly often in Persian and today in English.

This book by the distinguished Punjabi semiotician Professor Harjeet Singh Gill is itself an example of several aspects of this complex process of cultural reaffirmation, since it combines retellings of the stories with analyses of their meaning and illustrations of their key scenes in a vividly neo-ethnic style by Eric Vikramjeet Singh Gill. Indeed, the process is still more complex in this case, since it is in part a re-presentation of treatments published alongside essays on Flaubert and Abelard in H.S. Gill's earlier collection *Structures of Narrative in East and West* (New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1989), which was itself dedicated to Eric Gill.

Although that more academically presented book is not referred to here, it is the source of the two long essays which frame the present volume. The first is 'The Cosmology of Heer', which combines a summary prose narration of the famous story as told by Varis Shah, here further illustrated by extended quotations of the original Punjabi in roman transcription, with stimulating analysis of some of the main tensions in that uniquely complex text, what Gill at one point calls its 'conceptual framework that mediates between the two planes of anthropological and cosmological spatial translocation'. The concluding essay on 'The Human Condition in Puran Bhagat' similarly combines a prose narrative summary, here expanded by some quotations from the Punjabi original of Qadir Yar's classic nineteenth century treatment, with a semiotic analysis of key aspects of this very atypical hero, the yogi Puran Bhagat whose story, as Gill concludes, is a prelude to the breaking of 'the last thread of the umbilical cord that still bound him with the world around.'

Within these two essays, the central part of the book is given to retellings of the three great romantic legends which, along with the Hir story, have inspired so many Punjabi poets, film-makers and artists. These are the story of Sassi and Punnu, long naturalized from its Sindhi origins, the tale of Sohni the potter's daughter of Gujrat and her lover Mahinwal, and the tragic ballad of Mirza and his Sahiban. These are all presented directly, without notes or analysis, in a rather effective sort of prose poetry which uses very short lines. While very loosely based on the classic poetic versions, like Hasham Shah's treatment of the Sassi story, Gill's versions are clearly designed not as translations of these

but as fresh reworkings intended to capture the spirit of the legends in a recognizably modern conceptual language, e.g. ‘Sohni had to make a choice / an existential choice / to be / or not to be / to live to the highest ideals / of love and faith / to dissolve in the / absolute mist / of ideas and imagination! / / she resolved to / follow her heart / her ideals / her sublimity / her sincerity / of absolute fraternity!’ While this sort of treatment may not be to everyone’s taste, it is certainly an admirable corrective to the bland and cosy simplifications of these essentially complex and tragic myths which are too often encountered in many twentieth century anthologies and histories of Punjabi literature.

**Christopher Shackle**

SOAS, University of London

K. Moti Gokulsing, *Soft Soaping India: The World of Indian Televised Soap Operas* (Oakhill: Trentham Books, 2004). vii and 133 pp. £17.99 (pb). ISBN 1 85856 321 6.

In the last two decades there has been a strong and visible growth of the media and communication industry in India. As influential aspects of Indian media, television soap operas have become objects of interest for media studies, social science researchers and feminists alike. In *Soft-Soaping India* the author K. Moti Gokulsing attempts an understanding of these soap operas and their impact on social life and identity in India.

Gokulsing argues for the inclusion of soap operas in the study of Indian popular culture. He points out both the impact of these programmes on Indian society and the rising popularity of Indian television in post-liberalized India. While he does not offer a direct critique of soap operas, he uses them to study wider implications of the clash between tradition and modernity on Indian audiences. The book also provides an insight into the way in which processes of globalization and economic liberalization have shaped the new Indian middle class. Some of the key questions raised in this book are also based on the methodological issues around constructing an Indian audience.

The book begins by tracing the history of the genre and offers a general overview of some Indian audience studies of soap operas. It moves on to provide a comprehensive history of the Indian terrestrial channel Doordarshan and the growth of cable and satellite television in India, especially transnational media corporations - for instance, Rupert Murdoch’s STAR Network. Questions are also raised about the position of Indian consumers within the processes of globalization, and the way in which traditional gender roles are being reframed. Gokulsing’s analysis of the soap opera *Humraahi*, for instance, based on the study conducted by Population Communications International (PCI), is an exhaustive and informative analysis of the issues that the viewers of the programme raised, from issues concerning health and birth control to the role of

women in Indian society. He uses the epic soaps, Ramayana and Mahabharata, to underscore issues of national identity, patriotism and religion that were part of the broadcasting agenda of Doordarshan. While discussing soap operas broadcast on satellite television, Gokulsing analyzes two soaps, *Aashirwad* and *Amaanat*, both broadcast on Zee Television in the late nineteen nineties. These soap operas had significant viewership and also presumed a new audience, upwardly mobile, yet traditional. Gokulsing interrogates the roles and representations of women within these soaps, and especially audience responses to the new Indian woman and her urban lifestyle. Gokulsing draws on the work of Purnima Mankekar (1999) and Malhotra and Rogers (1999) in deconstructing traditional categorizations of Indian womanhood, the mother, the daughter and the daughter-in-law. He looks at the theoretical construction of the new Indian woman, as a viewer, a consumer of culture and tradition and as a category for advertisers and corporate market forces (Mankekar 1999, Malhotra & Rogers 1999, McMillin 2002, Chaudhuri 2001). He points out the failure of Western feminism in understanding the lives of Indian woman, and that feminism as an ideology has failed to mobilize Indian women (2004: 93), but he does not take this argument any further. In his analysis of the public service ethos of Doordarshan, Gokulsing develops insights from the work of Divya McMillin (2002) in locating Indian consumers in an increasingly globalized world. He uses audience research conducted by the PCI in different parts of India, tracing the work of Doordarshan in promoting higher education, popularizing science and environmental issues and raising awareness about issues like poverty and health. Gokulsing then profiles the Indian middle class and provides a narrative of the increasing role of advertising and consumerism in their lives, as catered for by satellite and transnational television.

Gokulsing argues that soap operas in India reflect the evolution of a new consumer oriented, economically liberalized and upwardly mobile Indian society. He revisits Doordarshan's contributions to creating a sustained Indian identity based on a nationalist and patriotic ideology through the use of stereotypical notions of Indian culture and traditional values. The section in which he assesses the validity of the different studies that have been undertaken by people like Sevanti Ninan (1995), Purnima Mankekar (1999) and A. Rajgopal (2001) is informative and interesting. He also points out the responsibility of the Indian government and media in addressing the social problems and issues that are raised by soap operas and the need to provide educative and entertaining programmes for the viewing public.

Although *Soft-Soaping India* is a dense book in terms of the sheer facts and figures that it contains, it does not try to delve deeply into the issues that it raises. It is text-book in its presentation, at times superficial in its approach to its theme. It is a very useful book if one wants a quick overview of issues to do with television, soap operas and Indian audiences. However, it fails to deal adequately with the complexities of Indian media as well as issues around nationalism, identity and gender politics, the construction of tradition and

womanhood and the later effects of a consumer driven ideology on viewing audiences. The conclusion was rather disappointing, as Gokulsing chooses not to take a position on contentious issues such as, for instance, communalism and the growing influence of right-wing ideologies on representations of women in soap operas. The increasing role of Indian media as a turbulent space of gender differentiation and gender politics could have also been explored further. The changes in the structure of Indian soap operas, and the influence of producers and other agencies and the increasing concern about media ownership and powerful multinational media corporations in India are some of the other topics that could have been addressed in greater detail. However, the book still serves as a valuable resource for people who are interested in the history and development of Indian soap operas and their role in creating a new Indian society. In tracing this, it fulfills its role admirably.

**Michelle Peters**

Brunel University

Kirpal Dhillon, *Police and Politics in India: Colonial Concepts, Democratic Compulsions: Indian Police 1947-2002* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005) 619pp. (hb) Rs. 1095.

In urban India, unlike Western society, the police in their *khakhi* or white uniform are significantly visible. And, in contrast to the people-friendly Japanese police, they are a symbol of fear and terror, of greed and corruption. With the passage of time since 1947, this image of an ordinary policeman has only become worse. In a developing society like ours, the police force constitutes an important component of the state apparatus that has the responsibility of ushering the hitherto backward society on the road to modernization. Unfortunately, that has not happened, but rather the police force itself became a subject of reform and modernization. Though numerous commissions and committees have been constituted from time to time for this purpose nothing could be realized under the given socio-political conditions prevailing in the country.

The present book provides a descriptive presentation of the Indian police in independent India covering almost all facets of it as is clear from the size of this volume. Dhillon had the privilege of being the Director General of Police in two states, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, besides being the Vice-Chancellor of a university at Bhopal. As a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla he worked on a project, later published as *Defenders of the Establishment: Ruler-supportive Police Forces of South Asia* (Shimla, 1998). The present volume is a companion to the previous one and extends the argument of the colonial era into the free country.

As is clear from the title of the previous book, Dhillon consistently hammers

this character of the Indian/South Asian police through out the length and breadth of this fat volume by referring to it as 'ruler-supportive and oppressive' or, more strongly, as a 'colonialist-oppressive ruler-supportive force that has little commitment or no accountability to the community' (366). He calls this police force 'ruler-oriented' as opposed to the 'community-oriented' police of the developed societies of the world. He frequently mentions that the character of this force is servility to the ruler and oppression of the ruled.

The author traces the origin of these characteristics of the police to its colonial legacy and the framing of the Indian Police Act of 1861 following the catastrophic events of the 1857 War of Independence. The imperialists ignored the model provided by the London police to frame this Act, and instead cast it in the frame of the Royal Irish Constabulary. It was very fair on their part to frame the constitution in a way that suited them most, but the problem lies in the intactness and continuity of the same in a democratic society. The author laments time and again that there is lack of political will to change the said Act as its perpetuity suits both the politicians and the bureaucrats. He does not seem optimistic at all as he writes: 'Whether Indian police will ever come of age as a self-respecting, dignified, well-reputed, efficient, honest, responsive, modern law-enforcement organization, remains open to question' (584). In contrast to the Indian scenario, the British home office is always on the look out for new ideas and concepts to improve the quality of the police service.

Dhillon advocates the genuineness and commitment of the National Police Commission (1978-1981) under the chairmanship of a former ICS, Dharam Vir. A very comprehensive report was prepared to cast the colonial police into its democratic mould following the findings of the Shah Commission regarding the excesses committed during the Emergency Rule of 1975-1977 when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of the country. This Report too became a victim of Indian politics like its two successor reports submitted by Julio Rebeiro in 1997 and by Padmanabhaiah in 2000.

There is surely an absence of commitment and sincerity on the part of powers that be, whether Congress or BJP or any other national or regional party, for realizing such a change/reform or modernisation of the police. The author suggests that it did not happen since it did not suit the powers that be. However, he does not go further in identifying or elucidating the structural and functional limitations of the police system as an aspect of the larger Indian socio-economic and political system. One of the author's limitations is that he is not a professional academic. But this does not mar the worth of this contribution that lies in compiling, arranging or systematizing the whole corpus of data that deals with the changing role of the police and its involvement at social and political levels in the consistently degenerating character of the Indian political and administrative system. This has been done not only at the personal level of having first hand information on such phenomena but also by citing reports from numerous sources - specially *The Times of India*, an established all India newspaper doing responsible journalism.

One more thing that I would like to mention is that no doubt Dhillon is critical of the police, the politicians and the bureaucrats etc. yet he has not highlighted those practices of the police that are 'routine and normal' with them but never come to light. For instance, his discussion on Punjab (chapter 12) does not bring out those aspects of the problem that are known only to the top police and political bosses that controlled the destiny of both the field police and the people. In other words, what was it that happened behind the iron veil of 'secrecy'? Dhillon had the advantage of engaging with the social rebels or dacoits of the notorious Chambal valley at the beginning of his career and with the religiously charged militants or terrorists of Punjab at its fag end. It would have been very interesting to have the first hand account of an insider to these phenomena, so helping us understand the complexity and diversity of Indian society.

**Birinder-Pal Singh**

Punjabi University, Patiala

Krishan Chand, *Migrant Labour and the Trade Union Movement in Punjab: A Case Study of the Sugar Industry*, (Chandigarh: CRRID, 2002) xv + 177pp, Rs. 295, (hb). ISBN 81-85835- 42-X.

One of the most enduring impacts of the rapid economic transformation of Punjab, starting with the green revolution in the mid 1960s, has been the influx of migrant workers into Punjab from the less developed Indian states such as UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Bihari migrants are perhaps the most numerous of the nearly 2.5 million migrants in Punjab today and the reasons for that are not difficult to fathom. For example, in 1965, per capita income in Punjab was only about one and a half times that of Bihar but now it is almost five times. Punjab's growth in the 1970s and 1980s was above the national average but Bihar's was below the national average, so turning Punjab into a major magnet for attracting both agricultural and industrial labour. Earlier migrants were predominantly concentrated in the rural areas, working mainly on agricultural operations, which either local labour was unable or unwilling to undertake, whereas over time migrants also entered and worked in the urban areas and nowadays, major industrial and urban areas such as Ludhiana and Rajpura are dominated by settled migrant labour, eclipsing local labour in most organised and unorganised sectors.

At the political and cultural level there has been a growing backlash against the 'bhaiyas' as one would expect in any country or locality where new migrants enter and are perceived as a threat. This is as true for Phagwara as it is for Southall. Thus in Punjab today the negative discourse on the effects of the influx of bhaiyas blames them for displacement and unemployment among local labour, rising crime, the growing problem of drug addiction and rising caste and

linguistic tensions in the state. Civic leaders and politicians of all shades often call for a halt to the influx, for them to be disenfranchised, and for laws to be enacted that would stop the transfer of property to non-Punjabis as happens in some other states such as neighbouring Himachal. Very few studies have attempted to assess the contribution of migrant labour to Punjab's agricultural and industrial prosperity but even fewer have looked at the effects of this migration on the workplace - on relations between migrants and local labour and on management and trade union perceptions of migrant labour. It is especially in the latter context that Krishan Chand's book under review marks a major departure.

Chand's book, published by the Chandigarh based Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, is divided into seven sections, the last ending with a summary of the main findings and some recommendations. The focus of the book is on the sugar industry, an important agro-processing industry in Punjab that directly employs 15,000 workers but indirectly perhaps up to 100,000 in the twenty-two sugar mills in the state. The author however restricts himself to concentrate only on the fifteen co-operative sector mills. Most of these sugar mills have come up in the post-green revolution period and over time have increased their dependency on unskilled migrant labour, usually hired though licensed contractors at low wages. As most of these sugar mills make an operating loss and survive on government subsidies, the hiring of seasonal and cheap migrant labour keeps wage costs down and contributes to their continuing viability. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of the dual processes of the growth of the sugar industry in both India and Punjab and of growth in trade unionism. Whilst much of this is useful background information on the growth of the sugar industry in India and Punjab and India's labour history and would merit discussion in a doctoral thesis, it could have been further edited away on conversion to a book as it distracts from the book's main focus.

Chapter 3 provides a socio-economic profile of the migrants and local labour. Most of the migrants in the industry hail from eastern UP and the north-western region of Bihar, the two poorest regions of the respective states. Most of the skilled migrants tend to have permanent employment contracts whereas the unskilled are taken on a temporary basis as seasonal demand for labour picks up.

Gaining access to both types of employment is primarily through personal contacts and through other informal channels. The majority of them come from rural backgrounds and maintain regular contact with their home regions and regularly send remittances to their families. Whilst the majority of the migrant workers are Hindu (most of local labour is Sikh) it is interesting that the majority of them - 46 per cent - are from upper caste backgrounds, raising possibilities of potential tension between local lower caste labour (Dalits) and upper-caste migrants. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 covers the perceptions and attitudes of labour towards trade unionism, trade union leaders and management, migrant-local labour relations and management perceptions of migrant and local labour.

Much of the material in these two chapters is drawn from the author's 300 personal interviews with people from the local and migrant labour, trade union leaders and those in managerial positions and provides the most in-depth understanding of the nature of industrial relations in Punjab's industrial sector. The author draws some interesting, although sometimes predictable, conclusions on the migrants' participation in trade union activity (i.e. low compared to local labour), and their relations with union leaders and management. It is not wholly surprising to learn that both migrant and local labour should be dissatisfied by the performance of trade union leaders and of management in terms of securing higher wages, bonuses or better working conditions. The author argues that, given that the perceptions and attitudes of local and migrant labour are largely identical and there is no evidence of any animosity, this rules out the possibility or desirability of development of separate trade unions and this in fact could form the basis for a more mass based and a more effective labour movement. However, currently a number of factors militate against this including the continuing lack of social interaction between them outside the unavoidable minimum in the workplace. Nevertheless, despite the caste dynamics, this possibility cannot be ruled out completely.

Whilst academic studies on agricultural migrant labour were conducted extensively in the 1980s, there are very few corresponding in-depth studies on industrial migrant labour. In this context, the book under review makes a significant contribution to our understanding of recent industrial labour history and industrial relations in Punjab. The book also provides a necessary correction to the more popular negative discourse on migrant labour by highlighting and acknowledging their positive contribution to Punjab's prosperity, not least through sustaining a low wage. This book is essential reading for scholars interested in understanding recent labour and trade union issues in Punjab.

**Shinder S. Thandi**  
Coventry University

Satwant Kaur Rait, *Sikh Women in England: Their Religious and Cultural Beliefs and Social Practices*, (Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2005) xxiii + 187 pp. ISBN 1-85856-353-4 (pb) £17.99.

Satwant Kaur Rait's *Sikh Women in England* is published as part of the Community Religions Project in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds, which aims to explore how religious communities function in particular areas. The author, having grown up in the Punjab, migrated to England in 1968 after she finished her Master's degree. Her own experience has led her to conduct a study of the changing experiences and values of Sikh women in England, exploring the complex themes of inter-



generational conflict, double identities, racism, sexism, and the need to reconcile these issues to the norms of Sikhism. She is also writing to counteract 'the biases and stereotypes often projected by the British media on issues such as arranged marriage, dowry and joint families' by giving the insiders' perspective on these issues (xix). In addition to informing non-Sikhs who may be influenced by the British media, she is also addressing Sikhs by claiming that they often confuse Punjabi culture with Sikh values. She intends to set the record straight for both parties about what 'really' constitutes Sikh practices.

Rait's study is conducted via individual and group interviews in both Punjabi and English with women from an impressive spread of ages, backgrounds, and places of origin. To balance out her interviews and get a more objective view of practices, she also participated in social functions and ceremonies and visited *gurdwaras*. She analyzes her findings in seven chapters. The first chapter gives background information about the Punjab, migration patterns, caste, and sects within the Sikh fold. The second chapter goes into more depth about Sikh religious values, beginning with a brief history of the Gurus and their teachings. Chapter three is devoted to describing the role of women in the Sikh faith and society, giving a history of the Gurus' egalitarian views on women as recorded in the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the *Rahit Maryada*. The author laments that her findings show that these values have not been put into practice, mostly due to the influence of patriarchal Punjabi cultural values. Chapter four looks at women's social life - their occupations, education, and general lifestyle, and how they have changed throughout the years.

The fifth chapter describes cultural values, beginning with attitudes toward marriage. Rait is careful to point out that although Sikhs follow the Indian tradition of arranged marriage, this does not mean the marriages are forced, as the British media often suggest. Instead, children add their input to their parents' search for suitable partners for them. Chapter six is a touching collection of life stories of seven women, told from their own perspectives, bringing to light all the issues raised in the rest of the book in an expressive and powerful manner. Her concluding chapter wraps up the book nicely. She concludes that Sikh women have adapted well to life in England, while holding on to much of their own culture. Sikh women, though they have come far in terms of education and occupations, still face racism in the workplace and have difficulties balancing their dual identities - British at work and Indian at home.

Rait's experience as a migrant in England gives her the sensitivity and intuition to make her the ideal person to conduct this study. Her exposure of the weakest links in the Sikh community in England - persistent gender inequality and ineffective management of *gurdwara* - is the biggest strength of the book, and proves useful for many audiences. Particularly poignant is her discussion of the pressure put on young women to conform to traditional beliefs, at the cost of losing their families' support. On their behalf, she calls for 'more support for women who do not fit readily into the expectations of their community and for increased tolerance and understanding of those who are striving to combine

their personal development with the love they have for their community and culture' (167).

I have some concerns about the author's sources and methodology. She cites a range of sources on diaspora studies, such as Parminder Bhachu's *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* and several lesser-known studies based in Leeds, but could have included Kathleen D. Hall's *Lives in Translation: Sikh Youth as British Citizens*, also based in Leeds. Her most notable sources on Sikhism are Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* and W.H. McLeod's *Sikhism*. The inclusion of more recent work would have made her book more academically robust. Another problem is that she neither took notes nor recorded her informants' responses during interviews, instead recording the information immediately after them. This method raises questions about how much of her informants' own voices come through in her analysis, since she is paraphrasing their responses in her own words.

Although expanding her range of sources would have made her study more suitable for an academic audience, Rait's book is valuable for making the reader aware of the wide range of issues surrounding Sikh women in England. She should be commended for making sense of cultural practices and experiences that span more than fifty years and three continents.

**Randi L. Clary**

University of California, Santa Barbara

Shonali Bose, *Amu* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004), x+142 pp. Rs. 200 (pb), ISBN 0-14-303232-1.

This is a novel about the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination and is based on the feature film, also titled 'Amu', directed by Shonali Bose, a film maker based in Los Angeles. The 1984 massacre has been the largest killing of civilians in a politically organised violence in post-independent India. No political leader or state functionary has been prosecuted and sentenced. The latest report on the violence, the Nanawati Commission Report, is also disappointing though it generated enough media debate that it forced the Prime Minister to make a statement of apology in the parliament. On the whole, it appears that there has been an attempt on the part of the Indian political establishment to make people forget this carnage. Therefore, the making of the film *Amu* and the writing of this novel should be considered as acts of political intervention against the establishment. Though there has been excellent documentation of the 1984 violence by concerned academics and human rights activists, there has been very little in the form of artistic work such as films, plays and novels. In this sense, as a piece of artistic depiction of the carnage, this novel fills a historic lacuna by countering the

politics of forgetting the carnage.

The story starts in Los Angeles and concludes in Delhi. Keya, a woman of Indian Bengali origin, lives in Los Angeles where she works as a radical lawyer and political activist, defending the immigrants who are especially under attack after 9/11. Her adopted daughter Kaju decides to visit India after completing her degree at UCLA, thus shifting the story to Delhi.

During her stay in Delhi, Kaju is keen to find out about the identity of her biological parents. She had been told by Keya that she was adopted after her parents had died in a malaria epidemic, in a village near Delhi. But as Kaju begins her painful journey of self-discovery, she learns that her parents were Sikhs and that her father and younger brother were killed in 1984; her mother, unable to bear the grief, had committed suicide. Her real name was Amrit (Amu is her nickname). Kaju is devastated by this painful revelation. Her grief and mourning for her dead parents and brother are magnified by the feelings of betrayal by her adoptive mother who had hidden this truth from her.

The strength of this novel is its brilliant synthesis of the personal and the political. Uncovering the tragedy of Kaju/Amu's life leads to uncovering the tragedy of Operation Blue Star and the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi and of the denial of justice to the victims of the 1984 carnage. References to 9/11 and Ayodhya 1992 at appropriate moments provide the global and national context to the 1984 tragedy, which had totally engulfed the personal lives of Keya and Kaju. References to September 2001 highlight the commonality in the politics of the Democrats and the Republicans in USA. Both parties, under the name of anti-terrorism policies, facilitated the victimisation of non-white immigrant communities and the rise of Islamophobia. Similarly, the references to 1984 and 1992 highlight the commonality in the politics of the Congress party and the Hindutva organisations. The Congress whipped up anti-Sikh propaganda in 1984 for electoral gains, the Hindutva organisations whipped up anti-Muslim sentiments in 1992 for Hindu political mobilisation.

The enmeshing of the personal and political is shown by Bose by describing the domestic chores of the Roy household [Keya's parents' household in Delhi] and the interpolation of the external world into it. Into the daily singing practice sessions, the dinner and the conversations are brought the TV news bulletins and the newspaper stories.

The novel also leads to an unfolding of many other dimensions of the 1984 tragedy and its aftermath. Kaju's boyfriend Kabir is shocked to find out that his father Arun Sehgal, a top civil servant in Delhi, was complicit in the 1984 massacre, having not exercised his official power – whether intentionally or under pressure from 'above' – to stop the killings of the Sikhs. The younger generation of Delhi Hindus is shown to be sceptical of their parents' explanation of their role in the 1984 Delhi massacre and of their perceptions of Operation Blue Star. Shonali Bose captures this generational difference through a conversation at a social get-together. Rohit, a friend of Kabir's father, comments on the 1984 Delhi violence: 'That's long buried history. It makes a

lot of people uncomfortable. We've learnt to move on'. Kaju, still not aware of her personal link with the carnage, retorts: 'Well, I suppose I've only just heard about it so I can't yet move on! Anyway, 5,000 killed in three days in one city...that's just so unbelievable. I don't even know if that many people died in 9/11.' (p. 74). Rohit then describes the Blue Star Operation as an attack on the 'terrorists'. This infuriates Vivek, his son:

Vivek could rein himself in no longer. 'Terrorists?' he said. 'There were more pilgrims, women and children killed. Had it been simply an issue of terrorists, the army would not have done a frontal assault but would have gone in from behind and captured them. The gurdwara was attacked in such a way so as to make a point. Otherwise, why would it have been nationally televised? Vivek asked. 'It was done to humiliate the Sikhs, to put them in their place, so that they wouldn't dare to stand up to the Centre' (p 75).

The novel also manages to convey the regional and ethnic diversity of views and feelings about the political events of 1984 in Punjab and Delhi. The stance of the Bengali and Tamilian characters in the novel is shown to be distinctly different from that of the North Indian upper caste Hindu characters.

The novel ends in a heart-rending climax in its depiction of the shattered life of Kaju and her final emotional reunion with her adoptive mother. Their story is not only that of two women who are intensely related to each other, but also that of two *strong* women, thrown together by destiny, who struggle to fight against racial, religious, and class injustice. In this, the novel has a strong and finely constructed feminist stance.

In this novel Shonali Bose has created a piece of work which has the quality of a classic. In the process of constructing Kaju's voyage of self-discovery, Bose has woven together, on the one hand, the micro themes of love and betrayal and, on the other, macro themes of globalisation, migration, diasporic identity, ethnic conflict, class oppression and national power structures. Reading this novel is a political act. It is an act of political defiance of the Indian establishment that has tried to encourage forgetfulness about the 1984 carnage. I recommend readers of this journal not only to read this novel but also to buy multiple copies to give to family and friends. The novel deserves to be read as widely as possible. This novel should encourage more creative work on the 1984 massacre. This novel is not enough. There are more stories to be told, novels to be written and films to be made.

**Pritam Singh**

Oxford Brookes University

Rosy Singh, *Rilke, Kafka, Manto: The Semiotics of Love, Life and Death*, (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 2001), xxv + 280pp. Rs 560.00. ISBN 81-86622-38-1.

These are three essays bound between two covers. What brings them together is their author's single-mindedness: she has studied Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka and Saa'dat Hasan Manto's works semiotically - not their corpuses as a whole but representative writing. The three themes of the title are better not taken as flush specifics, though 'love' and 'death' are avowed preserves of the first master. In fact the author's individual titles for the three essays are much more to the point: 1. 'Rilke: Dialectics of Love and Death', 2. 'Predicament and Tribulations in Kafka's Universe', and 3. 'Human Dignity in Manto's Writing: a. Hattak b. Thanda Gosht'. The reader would do better to take the 'life' of the titular triad a bit generally, or to altogether ignore the triad and focus on the semiotics of the reading. For that is what is offered. That is what is offered against much motivated reading, whether biographically bent or hermeneutically propelled towards the reader's own predilections or those of the time. A certain authority of the written text is presupposed in discourse analysis, even in the face of once celebrated reader response (who would forget the punning à la Wolfgang Iser of Konstanz fame and Stanley Fish of 'interpretive communities'?), leading perhaps to a unity of meaning. The syntactic, the paradigmatic and the pragmatic of that analysis are laid out in each case with a fervour that is exemplary but that may also be the hallmark of a convert.

The Rilke text dealing with the 'dialectics of love and death' is the *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*. It is with rapt attention that one reads the author's excursion into this novel, especially its sensitive cataloguing of death (perhaps no less aware of Baudelaire and suffused with a sense of *Dinge* than were the contemporary *New Poems*, though our author's method may not stress such 'history'), and its equally sensitive portraiture of lovers that suffer by loving but rise far above their objects of love. Those of us that have been only interested in Rilke's poetry and have relegated *Malte* to supplementary reading, may take a lesson from our author. She has done worthily by giving it its canonical due. But where she seems to be speaking more of Rilke in general and not of *Malte* alone, is the metaphysic of death. She does not name Wera Knoop of the *Orpheus* antecedent, but she is not far from there. Syntagma seems to have overtaken the paradigm. That apart, our author has done a commendable documentation of the lovers à la Rilke, in particular of Heloïse and Bettina Brentano (von Arnim) highlighting the absolute nature of their love. In full appreciation of Rilke's perception that it is women who know how to love (and to love is the issue and not, to be loved), she reads an early feminist in him.

Our author is a Germanist and her handling of Rilke carries that confidence. Yet it cannot be denied that she feels more at home with Kafka. Of course she has taken the more universally known text, *The Trial*, and surely the more exciting to deal with; still her grasp of the canon is unmistakable. And by canon

is not merely meant the Kafka manuscript and its problems, but also the critical canon. True she does not mention Walter Benjamin who could be better pitted against Lukacs, but her mention of Milan Kundera and, even if for the purpose of refutation, Elias Canetti does her credit. As to her discourse analysis, it is a perfect job that she does and the reader has little more to ask from her. However, her use of the word 'existential' is perhaps a trifle excessive. I, for one, do not straightaway see an existential crisis in the very opening sentence of *The Trial*. What is more obvious is rationality, if you want legal rationality, for one cannot be arrested without having done a wrong. Joseph K. has not done a wrong, so he must have been framed, that is, someone must have been telling lies about him. The most that can be said about his arrest is that it is absurd, absurd in the common English sense, without any metaphysical overtones. That would be hindsight. Anyway, our author only rarely trips. On the other hand, her gloss of the details is most comprehensive. In fact, she hardly misses out on any. One can name one or two, bits about Fraulein Burstner for instance, early and late, but perhaps none about the law courts and their precincts and the people around. Indeed it is a pleasure being ushered into the text by her. Reading her run-through to land a discourse, one relives it. And one would like to relive it again and again rather than being peremptorily told what it is all about. Surely our author does not do any such telling. That way she does a better job with Kafka than with Rilke. One may have liked her to add more aphorisms at the outset, especially the one about the crows and the heavens, but that is neither here nor there. One may also have liked her to talk about that story, 'The Judgement', where a successful young man named Georg Bendemann about to be married to one Frieda Brandenfeld and estranged from his boyhood friend, a failure by worldly standards, and from his widower father, a virtual recluse after his wife's death, is sentenced to death by drowning by him - that judgement thrusting him out on the road, on to a bridge and eventually into the water under. But perhaps that too is neither here nor there.

Our author's third essay is her best. One reason may be Saa'dat Hasan Manto's language that is much nearer home. Another reason may be Saa'dat Hasan Manto's world that too is much nearer home. And a third reason may be a sense of commitment to something that is so near home. Not that there is no Manto scholarship to draw on. But she feels so freshly and so urgently about him that she can claim to have carved out a niche there for herself - after reading her essay one will have to reckon with her as a Manto scholar. It is two of his stories that she deals with, 'Hattak' and 'Thanda Gosht'. Both she unravels, doing a thorough discourse grammarian's job and fending ideologies from above - first the presentation, then the analysis. 'Hattak' is the story of a confirmed prostitute who hangs framed pictures of her regular customers on the wall above her bed. Her earnings are not bad. She had just had a visit and was asleep with the naked filament light on. Manto does not spare details. A knock from her pimp wakes her up. She must go out with a rich customer who is waiting in a car outside. She must put on something attractive. From the dark inside of the car the *seth*

flashes torchlight on her face and shoos her away as if she were not the right *gosht* for him. The car leaves. This is the *hattak*, the hurt, insult, humiliation - all three in an ascending order. Our author takes issue with Manto's English translator who does not get the full significance of that word. The story is less about that shooing event as such than about how her hurt cum insult cum humiliation seeps into her psyche - how in other words she gradually wakes up to assert what our author calls her 'human dignity'. That takes the form of her pulling down those pictures above her bed, frames and all, and flinging them out into the street, including that of her just arrived 'lover' customer, the surrogate 'husband' who never pays but takes, the all-powerful *havaladar* from Puna. And then with that vestige of authority thrown out, she goes back to sleep with her dog with scabies now beside her from its usual place on her slippers under the bed.

Not an easy story spelling doom on the flesh trade. Our author quotes two other stories by Manto to highlight the issue of *hattak*, 'Khushia' and 'Nara'. 'Khushia' is about a pimp who is hurt by the nonchalance of a young prostitute who opens her door to his knock nearly naked. No sense of shame, no recognition of his manhood, as if she were no *gosht* to him but only to the buyers he brings. 'Nara' is about the insult a groundnut-seller suffers in the form of a foul abuse from his landlord when he came to beg a little time to pay his overdue rent - the insult that stupefies him at the outset but eventually drives him into letting out a loud and enormous but indeterminate cry. To make her point home, our author also compares 'Hattak' with three western 'flesh' stories, Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan*, Sartre's *Respectful Prostitute* ('respecteuse' is literally 'respectful'), and Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*. I am not sure about the first comparison, for the issue in Brecht is not the flesh trade as such but goodness (though the irony is not missed that the only good person found in Setzuan is a prostitute). Can a 'good' person stay good in this society? Is not Shui Ta the necessary other of Shen Te? The second comparison too is not really to the point, for the crisis there is built around the issue of respectability (white preserve and Lizzie too is white) used as bait against truth (the Penguin translation's 'respectable' may thus have a point). However, the third comparison is perfectly valid, though the double-edged humiliation in the case of Maupassant's *gosht* or *boule de suif* is primarily charged with pathos.

Our author has taken good note of Manto's concern with *gosht* or flesh and offered its semiosis from a number of stories. She reads 'Thanda Gosht' not just as a Partition story, as a study of communal violence, but as a story built around the heat and the cold of flesh. The situation at hand is hot. Here is Ishar Singh come back after eight days to his flesh-mate, Kulwant Kaur, brandishing a sword, obviously reminiscent of the violence he has perpetrated. But where has he been these eight days? Kulwant has every reason to ask. An embrace is not the true answer. Was there another embrace around? Kulwant has violence mounting inside along with her desire. The cut she gives him with his sword - the cut that is going to be fatal - does not infuriate him. Why? Besides his lately

earned impotence too does not seem to bother him. He seems to be at peace. Finally he confesses. Yes, there was another embrace or rather, attempted embrace, for the young flesh of his victim was found out to be cold. She had died during his escapade with her body on his shoulder. His errant days have been an aftermath to that discovery. So is his loss of virility. On his encounter with *thanda gosht* he too has gone cold. (The English translator of the story may have a point thus in calling it 'Colder than Ice', though our author is right that 'Cold Flesh' would have carried that semiosis.) Kulwant is his steady love, he has come back to her with his sense of peace, his newly discovered human dignity beyond the mere pull to *gosht*. And he has no regrets dying at her hand and on her bed. If one wishes one may call it a case of love and death, though not a la Rilke.

Our author's semiotic orientation is also borne out by her detailed analysis of Manto's English translation passage by passage. She locates all the deletion and deviation, all the softening of the language. 'Thanda Gosht' is Manto's masterpiece, but it did not go well with the public - it landed him in an obscenity suit the vicissitudes of which have been recounted by our author. Her essays on Rilke and Kafka - more Kafka than Rilke - vindicate her involvement with German studies. But it is her two-part essay on Saa'dat Hasan Manto that proves her métier. Those were her atelier, this is her product. Congratulations, Rosy Singh.

A last word on a couple of lapses. I am not marking the printer's devils, though there may not be many. But she often writes 'looses' for 'loses': oversight or mistake? Besides, she seems to think that the French *imaginaire* is more potent than the English 'imagination'. But can we say that after Coleridge? The front and back covers of the book are pretty. But it could have done well with an index.

#### **Amiya Dev**

Formerly Jadavpur University and Vidyasagar, West Bengal

Jane Stevenson, *London Bridges* (London: Mariner Books, 2002), 304 pp. (pb). £8.99. ISBN 061825773X.

Social mobility is an important aspect of the global milieu: communities from developing countries have been migrating to developed ones. This tradition of migrations is very prominent in the fabric of third world societies. Acceptability of any migrant community anywhere in the world depends upon the perspective of the native population. The Indian community, and particularly Punjabis, have a long history of migration especially to the UK and North America. British society is also traditionally considered to be conservative, racist and to some extent xenophobic. As literature is the mirror of society any variations and fluctuations in the temperament of a society are uniquely depicted in its



contemporary literature. Jane Stevenson's *London Bridges* sheds light on the changing norms and values regarding migrant acceptability in contemporary British society.

*London Bridges* celebrates the success of Asians in contemporary British society. Dilip Dhesi, the protagonist, represents the successful Asian who is logical, rational and ethical. Dilip's balanced personality represents an average Asian in his most compatible form in contemporary British society. Dilip Dhesi, an Asian hailing from Southall, symbolizes the perfect union of two entirely different worlds. He is a character who is aware of his traditional roots, and he nourishes and cherishes them. He lives away from his parents, his brothers and sisters but just to have 'a bit of peace'. Though he lives away from his parents, he is aware of their feelings and respects them too. His promise to his mother, 'If I give you an English daughter-in-law, I'll send written notification in advance' (p.105), shows his concern about her emotions, her feelings. Although he has strong traditional roots he is very much embedded in mainstream British society. Dilip may represent average Asians but he does not represent their dilemma, the excruciating ordeal which they sometimes undergo while creating a balance between two different cultures. He represents a character who has successfully struck a balance between his personal and social life.

New aspects of Dilip's character demand our attention when we analyse the character of Edward Lupset, the antagonist of the novel. An 'insider born and bred' he finds it difficult to adjust within the professional establishment, mainly because of his unethical personality. Whereas Dilip, an 'outsider', is well at ease and is having edge over Edward the 'insider' within the professional establishment. Dil appeared to be springing with effortless competence across the chasms that open in the way of an outsider who seeks to penetrate the establishment (p. 14).

The most striking, the most forthcoming aspect of Dilip's personality is his de-colonised mind. He has faced the attitude of 'coloniser mind' in university establishment but he is free from any kind of imperial hangover. He confesses the fact that at one point of time 'I was so impressed by the whole High Table bit, I actually believed they had the right to judge me as a person' (p. 108). He gives the reader a glimpse of his balanced and confident personality as he accepts, 'I don't worry about them accepting me any more.' The character of Dilip proves the multi-racial, multi-cultural aspect of contemporary British society and negates any charge of its being a xenophobic society in any way.

Dilip's views on various aspects of British society make 'London Bridges' a socio-detective piece of fiction. He reckons, 'social justice and self interest coincide if you think about it' (p.107). His social commentary is what makes him stand apart from other characters in the novel.

*London Bridges* brings forth the character of London city in a unique manner. The ecclesiastical Anglo-Greek relationship is well researched and convincing. The multi-cultural, multi-racial aspect of London is presented through characters like Dilip Dhesi, Jeanene Malone, Eugenides. The novel is

full of intrigue. The tension builds gradually but consistently. *London Bridges* is all about building bridges that link us to others. The novel introduces the reader to the different and exciting worlds of 'Alexiad', Mount Athos Lavra, university establishments and a bombsite garden at Southwark. Jane Stevenson gradually builds 'bridges' from one world to another and everything falls in place in the end. All the worlds are completely synchronized with each other till the end of the novel. As a whole the novel provides the reader with a thrilling experience while realistically portraying the condition of the Asian community, and Punjabis especially, in Great Britain.

**Gauravjit Singh**

Government College, Chandigarh