REVIEW ARTICLE

"FOUND" IN TRANSLATION: MULTILINGUAL SCHOLARS, VERNACULAR ARCHIVES, AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

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HENITIUK, VALERIE, AND SUPRIYA KAR (EDS.). *Spark of Light: Short Stories by Women Writers of Odisha*. Athabasca: Athabasca UP, 2016.
KAUL, SUVIR. *Of Gardens and Graves: Kashmir, Poetry, Politics.* Photographs by Javed Dar. Durham: Duke UP, 2017.
NERLEKAR, ANJALI. *Bombay Modern: Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Literary Culture.* Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2016.

The three books discussed in this article all practice multilingual scholarship as methodology for South Asian literary and postcolonial studies. They result from the consultation of primary sources in South Asian vernacular languages and the belief in the translatability of these linguistically and culturally complex materials. Moreover, they point to the interconnectedness and interplay of the regional, the national, and the transnational in various forms of literary expression and communication. Their focus, however, lies on the local, which stands, inevitably and necessarily, in relationship to and in interaction with the global. From this focus, the questions that concern the books arise: How do writers, poets, and scholars make sense of the world(s) around them? How do they write the everyday lives of actual people? Thankfully, the three books are testimony that it *is* possible to bring the vernacular and its culturally specific idiom to the reader who may otherwise be disconnected from the people and subject matters written about. Furthermore, they help us in reconsidering the notion

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of the marginal in regard to places, languages, and literary cultures. A multilingual framework is crucial to such projects.

The books share the goal of making accessible, providing context, and creating meanings for poetry and short stories written in the South Asian vernacular languages Oriya, Kashmiri, and Marathi, and English. Arguably, their audiences are English-language readers around the world. The short story collection is conceptualized for the Western reader as well as for the South Asian English reader without access to the Odishan originals. Kaul and Nerlekar's work may be speaking to the bilingual reader who has lost touch not so much with the non-English mother tongue (Guha) but with the tongue's script. Kashmiri, Urdu, and Marathi sources are included in the books; however, they are rendered in Roman transliteration and do not appear in the languages' original scripts.

Though they all deal with translation and biliterate exchange, the books' underlying concepts thereof differ. The short story collection *Spark of Light* may come closest to what the Sahitya Akademi, India's national academy of letters (est. 1954), would promote and support as the preservation of regional literatures, cultural diversity, and multilingual literary dialogue across India and the world. In fact, translation as a national project has been a pillar of the literary institution's activities. Many of the contributors to *Spark of Light* are Odisha Sahitya Akademi awardees and trained translators, including one of the editors of the volume, Supriya Kar. Kaul and Nerlekar are translators as much as they are bilingual scholars. Unlike the Odishan female short story writers, the poets discussed in Nerlekar's volume defy translation as much as they refuse the categorization of the Marathi (monolingual) writer. This category was a nationally promoted (but contested) one after the creation of Maharashtra as a monolingual state in 1960. Instead, Nerlekar suggests, their work may be conceptualized more accurately in a bilingual framework. Kaul, on the other hand, makes it a point to place the Kashmiri poetry next to his annotated English translations. In all cases, the literary analyses offered by the scholars are rich and thorough. Beyond the consideration of the primary source materials, the books are also important historical studies on post-independence contexts, such as sociolinguistic politics of Western-Indian urban spaces (Nerlekar), political analysis of the contested and highly militarized region of Kashmir in the North (Kaul and Dar) and lives, often human suffering, of the socially marginalized in Odishan literary culture in the East (Henitiuk and Kar).

Spark of Light

Spark of Light offers English readers rare and precious insights into Odishan literary culture. It presents a collection of short stories authored by women writers spanning the entire twentieth century. The themes of this literature revolve around the everyday lives, social interactions, and struggles of people situated at the margins of society—subaltern protagonists, if the term is warranted. A perceptive and carefully written introduction by the editors contextualizes the literature at hand and provides literary analyses of selected texts, thus allowing for an even deeper understanding and appreciation thereof. There exist only a handful of accessible translations of Odishan literature into English, and the present volume is a valuable addition to the fields of regional, South Asian, and World literature. It has been prepared by experts in language, literature, and culture, as well as translation studies.

Many of the protagonists in the short stories suffer from abuse, hunger, neglect, and loneliness. They are searching for "sparks of light" in often unbearable darkness. Writing about oppression and social inequality is not necessarily a particularly gendered feature of Odishan writing. The demand to be heard *as woman* and the refusal to be denied her humanity, however, distinguishes this courageous and painfully honest writing. The short story genre is a particularly suitable genre "for not only self-expression and self-discovery but also critical reflection on [women's] social and cultural surroundings, which so often threatened to submerge them" (Introduction xii). "Why?" proclaims Malati in Suprabha Kar's short story "The Vigil": "I have never had any affection since childhood. After four daughters, when I was born, my mother cried in despair; Father turned his face away. This is how I was received when I was born" (18). In this story, however, for once, a male authoritative figure (a Brahmin priest) stands by a socially fallen woman. This is rare, as in most cases families, communities, and the state are either unable or unwilling to protect women from the abuse and neglect they face in public and private spheres, as in "The Mendicant" by Reba Ray, or they emerge as the perpetrators of violence against women, as in "The Worn-Out Bird" by Aratibala Prusty.

While a majority of the short stories deal with challenges of women as mothers, wives, mistresses, and victims of rape, exploitation, abuse, and abandonment, children also feature centrally as protagonists. Learning about the basic feeling of hunger, and about neglect, from the perspective of the arguably most vulnerable renders the reader almost as helpless as the protagonists, as in "Sin" by Paramita Satpathy. One image that reflects the helplessness of children deprived of their rights and of their childhood is that in "Misery Knows No Bounds" by Sarojini Sahoo: a girl is caught in the mud and about to drown, yet hopeful that help is on the way. While she waits, she reflects on the constant abuse that she has suffered by her parents, teachers and tutors. In her reflection there is strength and a sense of empowerment that leaves the reader with the conviction that she will survive. In Basanta Kumari Patnaik's "In Bondage," another girl reflects on her life in bondage as she has been turned into a maid by her own family. In "A Fistful of Hope" by Golap Manjari Kar, a boy suffering from Amelia syndrome, born without legs, is denied a wheelchair and the reader is left asking why. And an ideal friendship between a Hindu and a Muslim boy comes to an end as both are killed in communal violence in "They Too Are Human" by Sushila Devi.

Adoption, abduction, and adultery lead to a variety of "unconventional" family constellations in the short stories in this anthology. The parents we encounter are loving and nurturing. Many of them raise their children as single parents in the midst of immense hardships and (often lost) happiness. All too often, they are unable to sufficiently feed and protect their offspring. The protagonist of Sanjukta Rout's "Curfew" satirizes his family's hunger during a curfew: "Who asked you scoundrels to be poor? Go and be born in rich houses. Bloody hell, even if there is a hundred-day curfew, you can have delicious dishes and sweets!" (98).

The short stories capture the precarious lives of subaltern people more in its ugliness than in its beauty. Poverty, hunger, violence, exploitation, injustice, and other burdens dominate the stories. The city emerges as the only hope and yet it is also a violent place. Even the house is not safe as it cannot provide nurture and shelter and often poses yet another trap, as seen in "The Trap" by Yashodhara Mishra.

What holds true for the traveller to the suntemple of Konark in Gayatri Basu Mallik's "Ruins" who, instead of visiting the ruins of the temple, hears the story of Champa, a woman who has not gotten over the tragic death of her husband and her three sons, may mirror the experience of the reader of this short story collection: "Instead of witnessing the grand ruins of a stone structure, I saw the ruins of real flesh and blood" (35).

In highlighting vernacular literature in English translation, the collection contributes to a development that Subramanian Shankar (xvi) has termed vernacular postcolonialism. Vernacular postcolonialism seeks to capture the vernacular idioms and sensibilities of a specific region and language. Translation is indispensable for such an endeavour, although the majority of scholars today are multilingual and use primary sources in languages other than the academically dominating English, French or Spanish. Even though the vernacular may often resist translation, many of the vernacular sensibilities can indeed be captured in translations. The English translations of Odishan short stories thus also enrich the *postcolonial* archive. They testify that, far from being a "substandard" of a literary language, the Odishan vernacular connotes "locality and particularity with regard to geographical region" (Shankar 11). More than that, they capture a form of vernacular realism and resistance that can go unnoticed in "transnational" postcolonial literature written in English (only).

OF GARDENS AND GRAVES

Of Gardens and Graves provides readers invaluable insights into the colonial and postcolonial histories and politics in Kashmir with a focus on how these manifest in the everyday lives of present-day Kashmiris. Scholarly, non-academic, and creative voices testifying to decades of trauma and loss as well as to the many lives under occupation in a highly militarized region claimed by the two postcolonial rival states of India and Pakistan are generally inaccessible to those living outside of Kashmir and not knowing the regional languages. To the Indian state, they are, moreover, unsuitable for the promotion of a specific victorious, territorial nationalist narrative. The book brings together such diverse voices and adds a painful visual narrative to the history. It centers on Suvir Kaul's autobiographical-academic essays that focus on Kashmir over the past three decades and distinguish themselves through a deep and sustained historical, sociocultural, political, and linguistic knowledge of the region. In the fourth essay, on Indian imperial politics in Kashmir, Kaul reads anticolonial resistance in continuity with "the intellectual and political framework of activists for the Kashmiri cause" (177). Following this logic, India, with its army, forms the Empire as it denies the possibility for Kashmiri self-determination. Regardless of the readers' political standpoint, the larger and more important critique is voiced in the title of the book that suggests the blurring of boundaries between gardens and graves.

The essays are interwoven with poems by a collective of Kashmiri poets and by the photography of the photojournalist Javed Dar. In their entirety, essays, poetry, and photography communicate why studies with focus on the vernacular and the local have global importance and demand to be read. As Kaul furthermore comments, "In this political impasse there exists an acute need to record events, to commemorate losses and occasional victories, to revise received historical narratives, and also to explore possibilities ahead. And all of this creativity takes place in a context where there is no escaping the fact that no one who writes on Kashmir can do so without her own identity being invoked to celebrate or denounce the ideas they explore" (102).

Suvir Kaul, Javed Dar, and the twenty-five poets included in this volume try to make sense of the everyday violence and human rights violations that have shattered the region once celebrated for its beauty and pristine nature. They provide an honest and painful story of a side of the "Kashmir conflict" between India and Pakistan that is personal and political, and that sheds light on the ways it is played out on the backs of ordinary Kashmiri people, including the region's poets. Kaul inhabits the advantageous positionality of the insider-outsider: As a child, he strolled the bazars of Srinagar with his grandfather, and as an adult, he has the capability to reflect upon the many changes that he has witnessed over the past decades. He shares diary entries such as the six days in Srinagar in 2010 and memories, which he revisits with an analytical eye. He includes an assessment by his mother, which serves as a powerful counter narrative to that propagated by Indian nationalists: The police, she says after many conversations with them, "are young men, far from home, underpaid, under-rested, and occasionally underfed, deployed into a situation in which they know that they are loathed for their uniforms. No shining nationalist zeal or commitment brings them here; their poverty renders them cogs in the machinery of the state, and they well know that" (58). In including this diversity of voices and drawing from personal memory and diary entries, Kaul's story is reminiscent of Urvashi Butalia's project of collecting Partition narratives for a glimpse of "The Other Side of Silence," as the title of her 1997 monograph holds. Kaul and Butalia both uncover the many layers of silenced individual experiences and communal suffering in their personal and highly political projects.

As "cultivators and curators of public memory" (Kaul 138), poets use the poetic genre to narrate, witness, and cope with traumatic events. It is to the credit of Kaul to have created a small archive of Kashmiri poetry by collecting, transliterating, and carefully translating Kashmiri and Urdu poetry previously published in vernacular journals and papers. This is not a straightforward anthropological field exercise. In times of curfew, it is as difficult and dangerous to obtain bread (Kaul 52-53) as it is challenging to collect poetry (Kaul 131). After deciphering the Nastaliq script, which is not included in the present volume, there is still the question of making meaning of a poem in its original and the translation: "The challenge for a critic who reads poetry while thinking about politics, or indeed who reads politics via poetry, is to detail the mediations that link text and context, writing and history" (Kaul 134). The carefully translated 28 poems are accompanied by short biographical information on the male and the few female Hindu and Muslim authors, some of whose works are also available on YouTube and Facebook, as well as by annotations that point to the complexities of linguistic and cultural idioms.

Making sense of the world, coping with trauma, and the common pain of people regardless of age, religion, and gender dominates the themes of the poems: "However much poetic voice is the product of studied artifice, it seems not to stray too far from the language of the community. This is what makes it possible to *read* (and this too is a discipline that has to be learned) in the conventions of poetic compression and repetition, in the cadences of phrases and lines, the trauma, vexations, and conflicted political life of a besieged community" (Kaul xxii). In light of the violence, loss, and dislocation that *every* family in Kashmir has suffered, Kaul prefers to refer to "community" in the singular. Dar and the poets continue this line of thinking. Dar's images of a house blown up, of a woman in the fields observed by a heavily armed soldier, and of playing children do not raise questions of religion and place, and even while the poets of different religions may write of divergent experiences, they too make linguistic choices that refer more to Kashmiriyat, and its region-specific composite language and culture *across* religious communities, than towards becoming the spokespeople of only one specific community. The reader is left with the conviction of the importance of writing despite the painful recognition that these voices of pain and resistance may have no meaning to those who, from a distance, dominate the political scene. At the same time, thankfully, the poems in their resistance and enactment of traumatic events, refuse to be mobilized for political purposes, as expressed in Ghulam Nabi Tak 'Naazir's "ghazal":

> That which could not be told, tell it now
> Keep, keep writing, the value of speech. (qtd. in Kaul 29)

BOMBAY MODERN

Anjali Nerlekar introduces the writer, visual artist, musician, publisher, and editor Arun Kolatkar (1931-2004) along with a collective of poets from the Bombay literary scene of the so-called *sathottari* period of the post-1960s. At the center of her interest lie bilingual and translingual, and therewith also translated, literary cultures, more specifically English and Marathi poetry between 1955 and 1980. In the process of creating a new poetic idiom with which to "articulate the ordinariness of life in local-urban as well as global spaces" (Nerlekar 10), she argues that the term *sathottari* incorporates "regional, national and international cosmopolitalisms through its global comparativism and its local articulation" (Nerlekar 10). Nerlekar convincingly offers a new methodology of understanding not only *sathottari* poetry in context, but Indian modernisms more broadly. More than that, in redeploying the term sathottari from its use in Marathi criticism, she vividly illustrates its interaction with literary movements in North America, Europe, and Latin America. Once again, in the manner of Subramanian Shankar, her study is an example of vernacular postcolonialism in which vernacular idioms and concepts are considered translatable and are accordingly translated into, rather than discarded from, postcolonial studies.

It is through a thorough investigation of the translingual, transcultural, and transnational interplays that the reader is convinced of the bilingual reading practice that Nerlekar proposes alongside her theorization of bilingualism. This approach is characteristic of other renowned flashpoint series publications written by bi- (or multi-) lingual intellectuals with focus on South Asian literary cultures (see Sadana; Shankar). At the same time, the book and the poetry it carries is about the local everyday lives of ordinary and not so ordinary people, including the poets themselves. Nerlekar's work reveals how vernacular cosmopolitan relies on and emerges from the knowledge of the local. It is for this reason that the first half of the book focuses on locality while the second half offers a literary analysis of Kolatkar's oeuvre, individual texts and paratexts. Paratexts, the diversity of productions that "surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it," as Gérard Genette (1) has defined them, are particularly prominent in *Jejuri and Kala Ghoda Poems*, in which placement of not only poems, images, and order, but also colour, is considered. Nerlekar's consideration of paratexts of little magazines also allows her to comment on the interplay of the Nagari and the English Roman scripts as they reveal the very close and complex relationship of vernacular, Anglophone, and international *sathottari* Bombay (66). The Nagari script itself does not make it into the book (a publisher's decision?), as the Marathi poems are transliterated. There are no limits to Nerlekar's approaches for studying the sociality of poetry: amongst the visual paratexts, she includes a hand-signed poetry collection of Allen Ginsberg presented to Arun Kolatkar and Ashok Shahane (62) in order to point to the materiality of the often abstract "global."

Nerlekar also draws attention to the relationship of poetry and the—male-dominated—publishing sphere, offering readers insight into the emergence and importance of the little magazine movement not only for the local Bombay literary scene, but in its interplay with cultures, literatures, languages, and personal and institutional interactions from across the world and from "home." As poets were creating their public sphere as authors, publishers, translators, and editors, they were also creating archives and canons. Small presses such as Clearing House and Pras Prakashan, and little magazines, of which Nerlekar consults around thirty, the famed "unperiodical" publications, were central in this process. The latter broke with the conventions of periodicals with regard to periodicity and format, cost and subscription policies. Their literary objectives were to write the Bombay modern by focusing on the ephemeral 'now' as experienced by the poets and in relationship to the local and the global.

Translation of poetry becomes a possibility and necessity not only in Nerlekar's, but also in the poets' works. Their translations are not one-directional and include a diversity of South Asian vernaculars (Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, English) and English [*sic*]. Nerlekar establishes an important distinction when suggesting that there is a difference between bilingual writers and translators and often, what is termed a translation may be more accurately described as a bilingual foray and as bilingual crossings (Nerlekar 208). This is, for example, the case with Kolatkar's *Marathi Jejuri*, which was published posthumously in 2011, but written simultaneously while the English *Jejuri* (1976) was written. It is true that some poems may be translations; others, however are "simultaneous bilingual transcreations" (209) or merely related poems. A close reading of selected poems reveals how Kolatkar himself "dance[s] around and over the idea of 'translation'" (198) as he raises questions of authenticity, of the "secondary" and the "original."

Kolatkar and his cohort also defied the linguistic politics following the creation of the monolingual state of Maharashtra in the *sathottari* period. They insisted on bi- and multilingual realities not only present in Bombay's bilingual life, but also cross-regionally and worldwide. Their credo was that literary spaces are shared around the world, as are themes concerning separation and alcoholism. To grasp this world, however, multilingualism and the practice of translation were indispensable. Hence, *sathottari* was "a movement that was messy in the details, mixed in its ideals and membership, and diverse in its goals, but it ushered in a new genre at the canonical center of literature, even if it lived only for a brief period of time" (Nerlekar 72).

Unlike the Odishan and Kashmiri literature, the literary activism from which Nerlekar draws is situated in Bombay (now Mumbai) as a geo-modern center. The questions that occupy Kaul and the editors of the short stories, however, are the same: how to read the vernacular, and in Nerlekar's case, bilingual literature, and that also in a genre that is marginal in postcolonial studies. Nerlekar's methodology for reading and interpreting bilingual poetry forcefully claims that poetry and the postcolonial are not mutually exclusive.

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