



reflection

Is English A Shortcut to International Recognition?

by Poornima Appukuttan

WITH coveted international awards and prizes coming its way, Indian writing in English has suddenly shot into global prominence raising a question whether writing in English is a quicker route to global recognition and media attention?

Indeed yes, says Shishir Kumar Das, who writes in both Bengali and English. "Writing in English always gets instant popularity for the simple reason that it has emerged as the lingua franca, the global language," says Das.

Then why the translated works of Spanish poet Pablo Neruda and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who writes in French, are so popular the world over?

"There is a hierarchy even in lan-

guages. While English is the most widely spoken, German, French and Spanish also enjoy international status. And in this linguistic hierarchy translations from Spanish stands a greater chance of being read than a work, for instance, in Hungarian."

By the same token, Indian translations are not picked up by the buyer, says Das as this hierarchy exists within the country as well and a Hindi or Bengali translation gains popularity much faster than a minority language like Tulu.

But Namita Gokhale, who writes in English herself, attributes it to how well the language fares in translation.

"Spanish lends itself to translation very beautifully whereas the same flexibility is not seen in Punjabi or

Tamil. Moreover, Spanish writers scope of experience is so wide that the works carry a universality of appeal.

Indian writings are very much steeped in the particular cultural and regional context which the international reader finds it difficult to relate to or empathise with, says Gokhale.

"French or Spanish works are popular because they have a pan-European culture that the Western reader understands," she says.

But author Urvashi Butalia of publishers Kali for women does not agree with the argument that predominant regional element is responsible for limited popularity.

While in the international scenario Indian language works are being sidelined, the national media, which rou-

tinely carries excerpts and interviews of writers in English, seem to be following suit.

Geeta Hariharan, English fiction writer, blames the media and the attitude of the upper middle class for this frenzy for works in English. "This is a highly complicated issue. To understand it we have to understand the power equation which lie outside the literary arena.

In this age of neo-colonialism, English has become the global language of power. "And if you are recognised outside, the people and the press eulogise you. This difference will exist as long as we continue to see literature in such crude dichotomies," says Hariharan.

The quality of translation in India

leaves a lot to be desired, says Assamese writer Indira Goswami, which is also a major reason for these works don't find many takers. The translation of some of the Russian works are carried out so well that the originality of the works remains intact, she says.

Das agrees with this view. Translation in Europe has been evolved over the last 100 years whereas in India we are yet to take the translation mechanism as an integral part of the whole literary exercise.

But according to Goswami, the publishers have the ways and means at their disposal to convert a badly translated work into a fine piece. "But they do not seem to want to take the trouble."

Butalia argues that this is a very recent phenomenon. Earlier publishers

did not want to invest money in translation as they were not sure if it would find a market.

"The Indian publishing scenario is different from the West as until 10 years ago, the demand was limited to books of educational or instructional value. So who would spend money on translation when there was not enough market for even original English works, she says.

But the scene is definitely changing. With markets opening up, publishers are willing to devote money and energy towards bringing Indian language works into limelight, adds Butalia.

Gokhale also agrees that things are changing for the better. Katha and Penguin have done commendable work to promote Indian works.

poem

Making of A Nightmare— I

By A Z M Haider

DENIZENS of dream world, poets remain closeted in the ivory tower of their imagination and rarely descend upon this evanescent world to face its stark realities. It is true they dwell in the world of dream which sustains them and keeps them going. But it is furthest from truth to say that poets remain unconcerned with realities of life. As Shelley said "I fall on the thorns of life and I bleed". Life Shelley, a poet, whether he hails from Bangladesh or Botswana, UK or USA, Iran or Japan, cannot evade the thorns of life. He, on the contrary, faces them with all their pangs and afflictions and bleeds silently. He suffers with the suffering humanity and shares their trials and tribulations. A true poet is a

Type of the wise who soar but never roam
True to the kindred points of heaven and home."

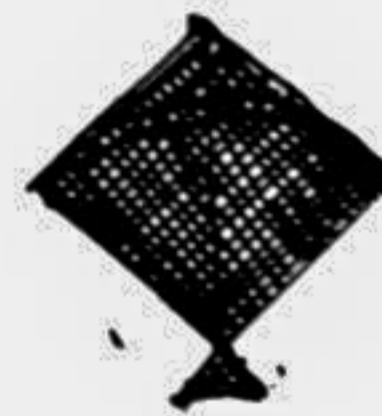
Fazal Shahabuddin is one of those bards who remains lost in a trance and luxuriates with his imagination in the world of his dream. Although he is eternally committed captive of his dream, he is not oblivious of his abode on earth. The dream to which he is committed is the dream of a brave, new world shorn of ugliness, meanness, injustices and exploitations. His dream is therefore, sacred. His dream is sublime.

Thus Fazal's dream, which revolve round this planet, the universe and the whole cosmic system, only reflects his deep and abiding love for the life we live on earth. The life system is not the monopoly of mankind. It permeates all objects of nature starting from mankind to the smallest of insects and tiniests of atoms and

Day after day I am heading towards a bad dream
I am heading at a break-neck speed
A terribly bad dream
A dreadfully bad dream
of destruction, extinction, death and an annihilation
I am speeding towards an unthinkable nightmare
I am now locked up in a death cell
I am now awaiting unaware the hour of all-devouring death.
By incurring expenditure of billions and billions of dollars rubles, pounds, francs and rupees
By amassing our talent, intellect
sensibilities and knowledge
We are building gradually, bit by bit
destruction as large as an epic and a painful nightmare
The nightmare which is another name of nuclear warheads
The nightmare which is another name of extermination.
The nightmare which is another name of cold wave
Fierce heat of a huge mass of light
Life-destroying radio active energy
Life that I am heading towards a bad dream
at a terrible speed and I know
The weaving of my nightmare is almost complete
I know that in this strong penetrating cold northern wind
Where there is an unending wintry night
of infirmity and death
I know the quantum of nuclearized nightmare

I have at the moment, when exploded
can easily throw the world to a total extinction
at least a dozen times.
The life of six hundred crore human-beings
will be extinguished in split of a moment
in a strong devastating whiff
The sky, the space will be steeped in a smokescreen extended all over.
The eternal earth and the ageless universe
The darkness described in Books of religion
which is another name of the Day of Resurrection
and continuing death
will descend upon the stifling moan
The sun rays of billion of years
The ancient moon light of several hundred thousand years
The whole sky will be enveloped by a curtain of deep darkness
impenetrable, boundless, inseparable
Illimitable curtain of gloom
will come down upon our life
rains as red as blood
as piercing as sharp blades of arrows
will alight on all our sources of existence
It would be a rain of ice-cold water
It would be a rain of biting snow
It would be a ceaseless hailstorm
The wholesale destruction will continue

to revolve interminably like wild storm
The pulsation of life will come to a dead stop
With the descend of glacial waves
All of a sudden roar of rivers will come to a standstill
The under-currents of all rivers will be clogged
The mountain ranges will be blown to bits
The water levels will roar and rise
to Himalayan heights
It will continue to erupt
and scatter all over
Against life and all human aspirations
Against man's eternal desire
Like flow of liquid fire
The sea wind will start running in blind fury
Trees will be razed to the ground
Forests will disappear in that painful destructive fury
The animals, the birds, the insects and the moths
will fall flat in a moment on the ground with a cry
and their bodies will be drenched in blood
The earth will be steeped in an ecological condition
shorn of light and darkness, flowers foliage and insects
and in an endless cold wave of extermination
in a nightmare
Lifelessness will be pronounced
windlessness like death will pervade everything.



Column: Parisien Portrait

Agony and Ecstasy

by Raana Haider

ON the eve of the final encounter between the hosts and the hosts, the feeling within us was one of pure ecstasy for the winner — since we wanted both Brazil and France to win the last Coupe Mondiale of the twentieth century. Hand in hand and heart to heart were also feelings of sheer agony for the vanquished — since we wanted neither to lose. But ce n'est pas la vie (but such is not life) and France trailblazed into a stunning 3-0 victory over Brazil.

The French team was slowly picking up momentum as it crossed hurdle after hurdle. And so too did the French public. For even the official programme of the World Cup notes that, "France is a paradox. A land of footballers rather than of football, the country has some of the best training facilities in Europe, and French players are exported with great success... and yet, the public is despairingly quiet when it comes to supporting and encouraging the national team. Critical and virulent towards their national stars, the French are generally only chauvinistic when a television screen is between them and the field... Will the public provide the warmth and support necessary to encourage their national players...?"

What was lukewarm and undemonstrative French public was slowly and surely wooed by the momentum of success and when France qualified for the semi-final against Italy — it exploded. The outpour of emotion; shrieks and

shouts, joy and disbelief, claxon of horns and furling of the tricolores (the red, white and blue French flag) on Les Champs des Elysees on the night of the semi-final qualification was a sight France had never seen. The celebrated first avenue of France became an impasse of humanity and tooting vehicles. The Mexican Wave by the public seated on the Champs des Elysees and then rising and raising their arms in unison was a sight to behold. Had France already smelt victory?

Within twenty-five minutes of the final whistle on the Stade de France, thousands and then millions poured into the Champs des Elysees and every large expanse and narrow street of Paris and every other city of France. The friendly festivity of frenzy overtook France by storm and surprise. The Arc de Triomphe was crowned in light — a crown of victory. On it were flashed "Champions de la Monde" (Champions of the World) and "France 3 — Brazil 0". On the facade of the monumental heart of Paris was screened the picture of Zinedine Zidane, the twenty-six year old Algerian-born scorer of two of the three French goals who plays for the top Italian club Juventus Turin.

En route to Roissy airport at 3 pm on the day of the final, I saw the crowds already heading for the Stade de France for the match scheduled for 9 pm. The fanfare of festivities following victory were still to be heard at 3:30 am the next morning. The following morning saw a downpour of rainfall — perhaps Nature's way of dampening the euphoria

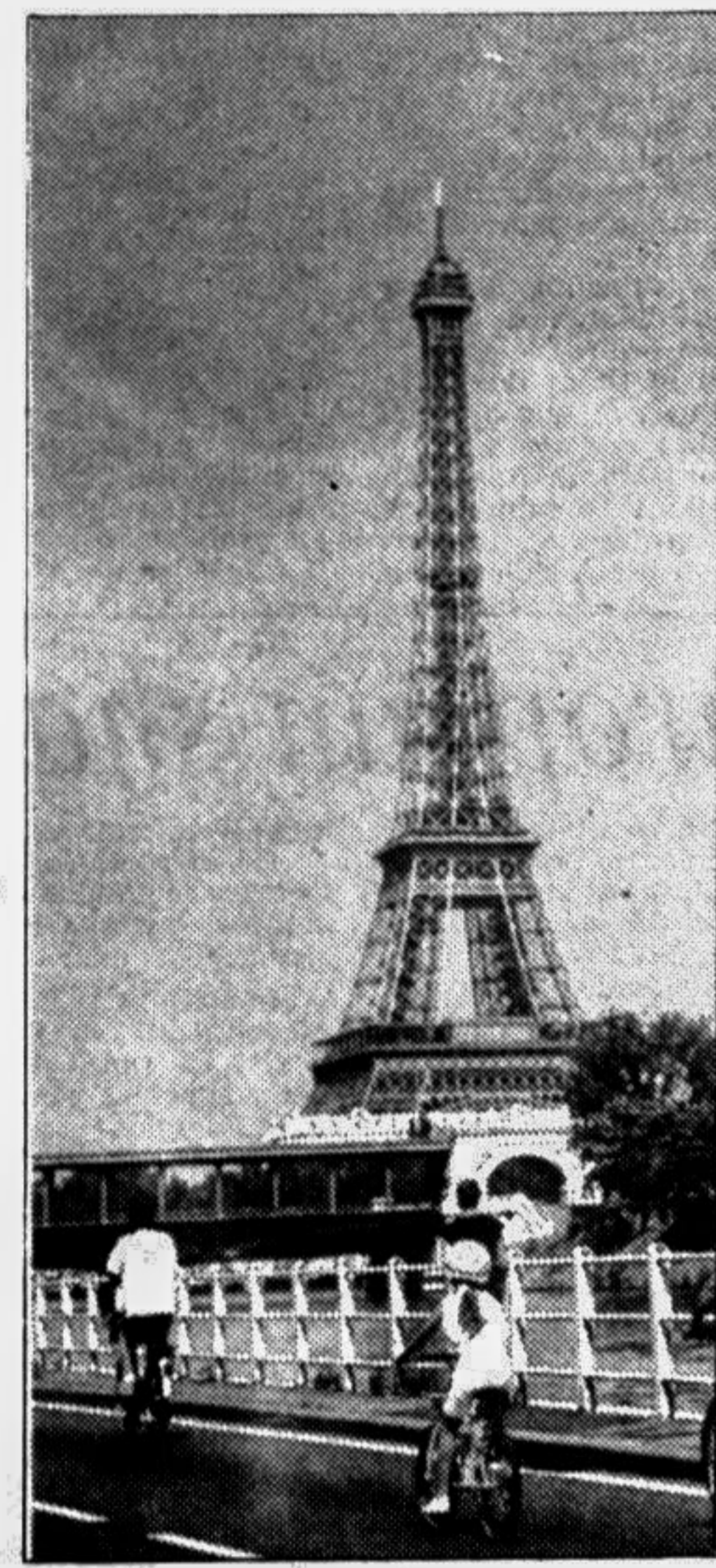
which nevertheless exploded once again as the victorious French team received the adulation of the nation and the ultimate honour — a triumphal march down the Champs des Elysees on the 13th of July. Even Nature turned sympathetic. For the afternoon march was held under a brilliant blue Parisien sky. "My God! this is like it was at the Liberation," (of France from German occupation in 1945), said to World War Two veterans in tears. From her balcony on the fourth floor of a building on the Champs des Elysees, Marie-Jeanne Larriot, 83 years old, swore that she has never seen the Champs this way. And she has lived at this address since 1939.

In an earlier article on the opening ceremony of the World Cup 1998, (Extra-terrestrial Extravaganza), I had written that the famed Champs des Elysees had traditionally always received the victorious and the beloved of France. This may have been the reason why Pablo, the giant representing the Americas (including Brazil), the favourites and four-time Cup winners) was selected to start off from the Arc de Triomphe and trot down the Champs des Elysees? So too had the body of Napoleon been taken down the avenue of honours en route to be buried at Les Invalides, so too did pass the French troops following the liberation of France at the end of World War Two, and it is where Le Tour de France, the traditionally favourite sporting event of France (the cycle race) ends. Les Champs des Elysees, of course, is the venue for the 14th July Bastille day parade commemorating the French

Revolution of 1789.

This time, it was not the favourites, Brazil who took honour, but for the first time ever — France — carried the 4.98 kgs. La Coupe Mondiale 98 trophy of gold and malachite down the avenue of victory. It was also a French man, Jules Rimet who first conceived the World Cup in 1928. However, it took France another seventy years to possess it.

There has been much analysis and discussion on television, in the newspapers and magazines of the social significance of this sporting event. The almost unanimous voice is one of cohesion and fraternity that this victory has created within the nation. Much has been made of the multi-ethnic composition of the French team, with winners whose roots go back to Algeria, Antilles, New Caledonia and Africa. Michel Wieviorka, sociologist and author spoke of the "real image" the French team represented of France. He also remarked that the multi-racial makeup of the team "is the triumph of republican integration." Fate could not have dealt France a greater gift in timing than this victorious sporting event on the eve of 14 July. Its repercussions have been felt far and wide within the country's social fabric. Isn't the demolishing of the Bastille prison, the symbol of royalty and privileges by the marginalized masses in the 1789 French Revolution the raison d'etre for the 14th July celebration of the event? In commemorating today that past, France appears to have renewed its commitment to "Liberte, Egalite et Fraternite."



And on the 14th of July celebrating Bastille day, President Jacques Chirac of France royally received the equippe Francaise, les blues (the French team, the blues) at the presidential palace, Elysees Palais for a garden party. We saw Zinedine Zidane, the darling of the French public enter the Elysees amongst cries and shrieks. To the cries of "Et un! Et deux! Et trois zero!" (And one! And two! And three zero!) and the singing of "Champions of the World" (in English within the bastion of the French presidency!) and in the sumptuous splendour of the Elysees Palais; the French team, their wives and children were introduced by a visibly thrilled President Chirac flanked by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and members of the French cabinet to a rapturous crowd of invitees. For the next elections, President Chirac has the vote of French women in his pocket. He made a marvellous gesture by particularly thanking the wives of the victorious team. Aime Jacquet, the coach of les blues was bestowed the highest French civilian honour. He was given the Legion of Honour medal.

As the host-country winner of La Coupe Mondiale 98, the last major sporting event of the twentieth century, France in its first-time victory with a score of 3-0 has cut a milestone in French history. Was it not Charles de Gaulle who said, "France was created either for complete success or exemplary misfortunes. France cannot be France without grandeur." All or nothing. And France went out for all.