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face away from it, as though

she'd found a worm in a sweet

fruit. When after five days she

left the lying-in room, she had

turned into a naked sword.

SHORT STORY

Ms. Padma

PREMCHAND (translated and slightly abridged by S. Mahnowar)

fter becoming a successful lawyer Ms. Padma discovered a new experience: the emptiness of life. Considering marriage an unnatural bond, she had decided that she would remain single and enjoy life. After she had gotten her MA and Law degrees she began her practice. She was vound. beautiful, soft-spoken, and also extremely intelligent. There was nothing to stand in her way. Quickly she had left her young male colleagues far behind as she forged ahead. Now there was no longer much need for hard work: most of her cases were routine and needed no extra preparation. She had learned the formulas by which one triumphs at the bar; consequently she now found she had leisure time, which she spent reading romance novels, strolling, going to the cinema and visiting friends. But all the same she continued to experience the emptiness of life. It was not that she was indifferent to men; on the contrary, she had no shortage of lovers. Had she possessed nothing but youth and beauty she still would not have suffered from lack of worshippers, but with youth and beauty joined to wealth as well, how could there fail to be a flock of admirers? Padma was not averse to sexual eniovment: what she detested was dependence and making marriage the chief occupation of life. As long as she could remain

enjoyment since she considered it merely an appetite of the body to be appeased. Therefore she had dozens of lovers--lawyers, professors, doctors. But every one of them were mere sensualists--like bees who unconcernedly drink the nectar and fly away. There was not even one she felt she could rely on. This was the moment when she realized that her heart demanded not just physical enjoyment but something more as well: a total self-dedication, and this she had not found. Among her lovers there was a certain Mr. Prasad--a handsome man, and learned. He was a professor in a local college, and also an ardent believer in free love. Padma became infatuated with him and wanted to keep him attached to her. to make him completely her own; but Prasad skirted free of such commitment. One evening Padma was about to go out for a walk when Prasad arrived. The walk was postponed. There was far more pleasure in chatting than in strolling, and today Ms. Padma had in fact, decided, after much soul-searching, to speak frankly. With her gaze fixed on Prasad's intoxicating eyes she said, 'Why don't you come and stay in my bungalow?' 'Oh,' said Prasad with malicious amusement, 'the result would only be that in two or three months we won't even be talking to one another.

pleasure why should she? She

saw no moral obstacle to

'I fail to get your point,' said Padma 'The point is simply what I'm saying. 'But why?'

and vice versa. Ill feeling will spring up, how can our friendship continue?' The two of them were silent after Prasad's clear and blunt words. Finally, it was Prasad who said, 'Until we take an oath that from this day forward I am yours and you are mine there's no way that we can live together.' 'Will you take such an oath?' 'Will you?' 'I will,' said Padma. 'Then so will I.' 'But except for this one thing I'll remain free in every other manner. 'And I, except for this one thing, will remain free too.' 'Aareed. 'Agreed! 'When do we start?' 'Whenever you say.' Then I say, right from tomorrow on.' 'It's a deal. But if you don't behave in accordance with the oath, then what?' 'And what about you?' said Padma. 'You can throw me out of the house; but how could I punish vou?' You'd just give me up. What else

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could you do?' 'Not at all, that wouldn't satisfy me in the least. If it came to that, I'd want to debase you, even kill vou.' 'How cruel you are, Prasad!' 'So long as we're both free, neither of us has the right to criticize the other. But once we're bound by the oath I won't be able to stand any disregard of that oath, nor will you. You have the means to punish me, but I have none to punish you. The

law gives me no rights. I could

'I don't want to lose my inde-

enforce the oath only by my pendence.' said Prasad. 'You don't want to lose yours. If your brute strength, but how could I lovers come to you I'll be jealous do anything in front of all these servants of yours?' 'But while I'm yours, this house. these servants and property,

Luher

everything is yours. We both know that there's no greater social sin than envy. I can't say whether you love me or not, but I'm ready to do, to bear, anything for your sake. 'Are you really sincere, Padma?' With all my heart. 'But understand this, I'm not going to stay on in your house as a guest. I'll stay only as master.

'You shall stay as master not only of the house but of me as well. And I shall be your mistress.

Professor Prasad and Ms Padma live together and are happy. For both of them the ideal of life they had set for themselves has become true. Prasad earns a salary of only two hundred, but now it doesn't bother him to spend twice that. Formerly he drank liquor only occasionally, but now he's drunk day and night. Now he has his own private car, his own private servants, he goes on ordering every sort of expensive item and Padma happily tolerates all his extravagances. But the more Padma gives way to him, the more

he abuses her generosity. Just as in politics authority tends to be abused, in the same way in love as well it is abused, and the one who's weaker must be made to pay. Padma, so proud of herself, was now Prasad's whore and why should Prasad fail to profit from her weakness? In analyzing her he had hit the nail on the head and was driving it in deeper every day, to the point where nights he began to come home late.

He would make some excuse not to go out with her, then take his car out and dash off.

By now two years had passed and Padma was pregnant; she had also begun to get fat. The freshness and charm her looks once had were now no more. She was like, as it were, a rare commodity no longer prized because of over-availability. So it was that one day when Padma returned home Prasad had disappeared. She became extremely irritated. For some time now she'd been observing Prasad's mood changing, and today she'd got up the courage to speak plainly to him. Ten o'clock stuck, then eleven, then midnight. Dinner got cold, the servants went to bed. Some time between twelve and one Prasad came home.

Padma had screwed up her courage, but as soon as she stood before Prasad she became aware of the weakness of her position. Nevertheless she asked him in a fairly firm voice, 'Do you have any idea how late it is?' At this instant she appeared to Prasad like the image of ugliness. He had gone to the cinema with a woman student from his college. He said. 'You ought to have gone to sleep. In your condition you ought to get as much rest as possible. Padma's courage mounted. She said, 'Answer my question even if it finishes me off. 'Then you can finish me off too,' said Prasad. 'For some time now I've watched your feelings change.' Your eyesight must have gained considerably in acuteness.' 'You've been cheating on me, I can see that plainly enough." 'I didn't sell myself to you. If

you're really fed up with me I'm ready to leave right now. 'How can you threaten to leave? You gave up nothing when you came here. 'I didn't give up anything? You

Having become a mother she have the nerve to say that! You experienced a strange power in think you've clipped my wings, herself. Wanting to settle some bills she but at this point I'm ready to shake you off! sent her servant to the bank with Padma's courage seemed to a check. He came back empty-

have been extinguished. Prasad handed. 'The money?' Padma asked. was already taking out his suitcase. Humbly she said to 'The teller told me that Prasad him, 'I haven't said anything for Babu withdrew all the money." you to get so angry. I was only Padma felt as though she'd been asking you where you were. shot. She had saved up the money as if it had been her life's Don't you even want me to have that much right? Haven't I blood. For the child! Alas! On always been ready to do leaving the hospital she learned anything for you? And now, that Prasad had taken a girl from when I'm in this condition ... ' the college and gone off to England. Furious, she went into She choked up and, laying her head on the table, began to sob.

Motherhood was now a very unpopular topic with Padma. One concern alone hovered over her. What should she do, what should she not do? She had reached the final stage of her pregnancy and no longer went to court but sat at home alone the whole day. Prasad would come home in the evening, have his tea and then rush out again and not show his face before midnight. Nor did he conceal from her where he went. It was as though he had come to hate the very sight of her. The labour pains began. Prasad was not aware. A nurse and a woman doctor were standing by but Prasad's absence made Padma's labour all the more terrible. When she saw the child beside her she felt a wave of happiness; but then, not finding Prasad with her, she turned her

the house, picked up Pasad's picture, dashed it to the ground and stamped on it. Whatever he had left behind she gathered together, put a match to it and spat on his name. A month went by. Padma was standing at the gate of her bungalow holding her child. Her rage had finally turned to grief and despair. Sometimes she felt sorry for the child, sometimes affection, sometimes hatred. On the road she saw a European woman with her husband pushing a perambulator with

with tears. Premchand, the pseudonym used by Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936) is arguably the greatest writer in Hindi, with an astonishing output of fourteen novels and around three hundred short stories. Bengalis will know him best as the writer of the story made into the movie 'Satranje ki khelari' by Satyajit Ray. S. Mahnowar is an academic/translator.

their child in it. She watched the

lucky couple and her eyes filled

On Vizzy and Viv

KHADEMUL ISLAM

India's Captains: From Nayudu to Ganguly by Partab Ramchand; Delhi: Penguin India; 2004; pp. 272; Rs. 250. Stadium'er Shai Addata Aaj Aar Nai by Dulal Mahmood; Okkhorbrikto, Dhaka; February 2005; pp.191; Tk. 125.

REVISED AND UPDATED INDIA'S CAPTAINS balcony at Lord's) are quite good. For me, though, the best parts were, as always, the cricketing lore. As when, during India's farcical 1936 tour of England led by the sartorially dazzling, intrigue-ridden 'Vizzy' (the maharaja of Vizianagaram), while walking out to the pitch during a Test match Mushtaq Ali confided to Vijay Merchant that

he had been 'instructed' to run him out. Merchant merely smiled and said 'Trv it if you can.' Or

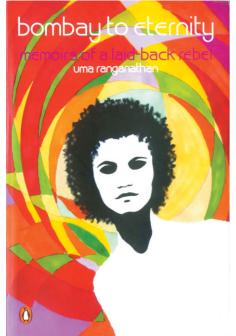
Book Reviews

A Search for Truth

RUBAIYAT KHAN

free and savour sensual

Bombay to Eternity: memoirs of a laid-back rebel by Uma Ranganathan; Penguin Books



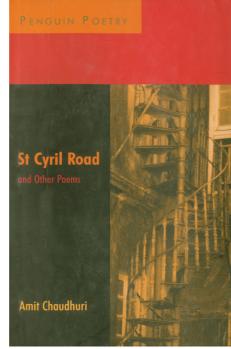
the core, discard societal rules that bind, and ultimately embrace life to simply be. Ranganathan leads a rather Bohemian lifestyle, defving conventions by staving single, befriending Sarla her maid who becomes her closest confidante, and toying--if momentarily--with the notion of finding love in a member of the same sex.

In chapters such as 'Bombay Diary'. 'The age of psychoanalysis', and 'Adventures in consciousness' amongst others, the author laments over the disconcertingly transient quality of life, all the while struggling to survive, to not drown in frequent bouts of loneliness and helplessness of the kind that arise out of a loss of control over one's own destiny. Ranganathan's forces us to face up to questions that have, since time immemorial, plagued the thinking man: Who are we? Do we have a purpose? If so, do we have a greater mission that lends us with a degree of grandiosity, or are we not only miniscule in the larger scheme of things, but pathetic, even bestial by nature? Within the novel, the character of Munia--a deaf, mute woman that the author had taught during her days as a teacher--compels us to confront such questions. The author's own feelings toward her are a mixture of amazement and disgust. She writes. "I watch [Munia] while dim prehistoric shapes resembling bats and lizards slunk through my mind...the more I stared at [her] I would see myself go all lumpy and shapeless, swinging like an ancient arboreal creature from tree to tree in forested gloom." It is disturbing to witness a human being, deformed, and reduced to an animal-like stature, but what perhaps is more terrifying, is how -- as the author herself acknowledges -- Munia mirrors our own state of being. We fear, even loathe her, because she seems to epitomise the darker side of man. But according to Ranganathan, there is salvation, which "really lies in giving up the fight and acknowledging [our] own humanness"; to 'let go', is to free the Self. As we draw towards the last chapters of the novel, we find the author's search to find the Truth does not go in vain. Arguably, it leads her to reach a kind of embryonic state of being, a neutral space where she may finally be at peace with herself and all around her: "I simply [lie] in the cradle of the universe like a new-born baby, dazzled by the colours and textures." The downside to this particular narrative is that while at times the prose is seductive, drawing us in, enchanting us at first with a tone infused with wit, humour and candour, the rather seamless mode of storytelling that continues can edge on boredom, growing to be a rather tedious and redundant process.

Metonymy to Metaphor*

KAISER HAQ

St. Cyril Road and Other Poems by Amit Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2005. Rs. 200.



neoclassical poetry leans towards the metonymic and Romantic prose towards the metaphoric pole. In our time the poetry of Larkin deliberately swerves towards metaphor, but 'the metaphors are

metonymy. Not that Larkin doesn't use foregrounded against a predominantly metonymic background, which is in turn foregrounded against the background of the (metaphoric) poetic tradition' (Modes of Modern Writing).

This is also true of Chaudhuri's early poems like the two mentioned above, which make up the 28 pages of Part One of this, his first collection. Alongside these poems Chaudhuri set to work on his first novel, A Strange and Sublime Address, which appeared in 1991. The completion of the novel marked the end of writing 'metonymic' poems. Henceforth Chaudhuri reserved 'metonymic' writing for his prose narratives, where it 'properly' belongs, though here too something of a crossover occurs, for his prose exhibits a poetic, perhaps even precious, quality, with a conspicuous use of metaphors and similes. Chaudhuri acknowledges this in his Preface when he says that 'the prose swallowed up, or at least incorporated the poetry.' He continued to write poems, but now they were 'sparer and more compressed.' I think they are also closer to the metaphoric pole than the early poems. They make up the bulk of the collection (Parts Two and Three), a good 50 pages or so of varied and frequently evocative poetic notations, sometimes humorous:

India; 2004; pp. 289; Rs 295 I could have been looking at a mindkilling mosaic of grey stone instead of at the grey waves rippling back and forth between the black rocks...

And so goes the narrative voice in Uma Ranganathan's Bombay to Eternity. The metaphoric grey waves may well represent our minds, the ominous stone wall emblematising all our collective experiences, prejudices, our inhibitions and fears, and serving as the obstacle that separates us from the path of enlightenment, or 'the Big Meaning', as the author says. The quote above represents a choice, of either succumbing to lead a superficial existence, or trying to break down the stone wall, as the protagonist relentlessly strives to accomplish. She plunges into an all-consuming quest to find the Self over Life and Death, and yearns for peace and for freedom--from her own emotional baggage, and the assortment of life's experiences that weight her down. In short, the mind is not allowed to stagnate while it drifts through the pages of this novel.

In the book, life is not presented as linear, but as a collage, a form emulating the fragmented experiences of our own lives. And why not? Bombay to Eternity is not a work of fiction: rather, it consists of memoirs with each of the ten or so chapters based on non-fictional accounts gleaned from the author's life, who is, in fact, the protagonist. In her quest to find herself, Ranganathan undergoes psychoanalysis, attends extensive workshops, and even experiments with consciousness-expanding substances. Through all of that, she attempts to strip away layers of pretenses in order to reach

Life goes on in Bombay to Eternity. The journey ends, or rather begins optimistically, with a vision the author longs to see, of a metaphoric sunset heralding in a new world.

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My first encounter with the work of Amit Chaudhuri was in the pages of Alan Ross' London Magazine, which published two of his poems in 1987. They made an impression on me, especially 'The Bandra Medical Store,' partly because of its unassuming tone, partly because of the way it wrung poetry out of the commonplace. Anecdotal in structure, it enumerates the sights and sounds with cool precision, then brings the narrative to a whimsical close. Chaudhuri desists from crushing a warrior-ant: 'so dignified, so black. Had I been smaller, I'd have ridden him back home, or off into the sunset.'

I recall wondering where the poet would go from here. The other poem in London Magazine, 'Letter from the Hills,' was also a narrative, in similar long lines of free verse cadenced like prose, and though there were felicitous similes and metaphors embedded in them, it was a form that could easily sink into monotony.

Theory-savvy readers might use David Lodge's schema, derived from the structural linguistics of Roman Jacobson, that accommodates all discourse between two poles--the metaphoric and the metonymic (which is allied to the synecdochic). Prose, especially in the realistic mode, tends to be metonymic, 'forwarded essentially by contiguity,' while poetry, especially in the lyric mode, tends to be metaphoric. But in the oscillation of literary trends, the distinction becomes less than clear-cut:

. . . . they tried it tentatively; the dwarf like jet of water sprang ceilingward and surprised their secret regions. ("The Bidet")

Sometimes wistful:

And the old homelovingness of light falling and touching the black utensils; the bee-buzz of love, part song, part nature's reverie. ("Kitchen")

And at least once topically disturbing:

We slept badly; the French windows shook and she and I woke from a dream, thinking thev

had come, and our city was taken. ("The Fall of Baghdad")

I hope we don't have to wait long for Chaudhuri's next collection.

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*Note: For the benefit of the casual reader it may be appropriate to define 1) metonymy: (Greek 'name change'), a figure of speech in which the name of an attribute or a thing is substituted for the thing itself, as in 'The Stage' for the theatrical profession; 2) synecdoche: (Greek, 'taking up together), a figure of speech where the part stands for the whole, as in 'give us our daily bread' where bread stands for meals.



The two books reviewed here have been written by sports journalists: one by an Indian and the other by a Bangladeshi. Both have been aimed at the popular market, and make for easy reading. Dulal Mahmood's book is a collection of his thoroughly topical newspaper articles, and is divided into three sections: cricket, football, and 'other.' His cricket section has two eminently readable pieces, one an outline (admittedly sketchy, but better sketchy than none at all) of Bangladesh's emergence in the international arena, and the other a rather remarkable tribute to the Bengali cricket writer Shankariprasad Babu and his books. penned with genuine feeling. I had never heard of Shankariprasad before, and therefore it was an eye-opener. The football articles are routine, while in the 'Other' section, his writings on the lack of playing grounds for children, his espousal of sports for women (especially given the current political climate), and the sorrow expressed over the disappearance of the 'sports adda,' which used to be a fixture in the restaurants and clubhouses around Dhaka stadium throughout the '50s down to the '80s, make for appealing reading.

Ramchand's book is a comparative evaluation of all Indian cricket captains, men in the 'hot seat'-- since independence alone there have been eleven presidents, thirteen prime ministers and twenty-eight cricket captains. It makes for brisk reading, a sort of history of Indian cricket--from the early years of princes and seething politics to the present-day meritocracy of sorts-- seen through the prism of captaincy. The chapters on India's legendary first captain, C. K. Nayudu, Gavaskar, Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and Sourav Ganguly (adjudged the one with the most successful record and therefore to be leniently treated about stripping off his shirt and waving it from the

when, after the West Indies were routed by Indian spinners in 1987-88 at Madras on what they believed was a deliberately underprepared pitch, Viv Richards warned the Indians 'I have got a long memory, maaan.' He did. When Dilip Vengsarkar's men went to the Caribbean the next year, the waiting quartet of Walsh, Ambrose, Bishop and Marshall literally bouncer-ed them around the islands.

The two books offer interesting comparisons in terms of style, content and language in sports writing between the two countries. The obvious one is that unlike in Bangladesh, where book-length efforts by sports journalists remain confined to Bengali, Indians feel comfortable writing sports books, especially cricket books, in English. Stylistically speaking, (and here I confess that my familiarity with sports writing in the Indian vernacular languages is limited to Desh magazine), the Bangladeshi Bengali style of sports writing can sometimes veer towards the gaudily sentimental. As amply displayed in Dulal Mahmood's opening piece titled Raja Kadlo, Cricket Hashlo--about tears streaming down from King Viv Richards' eyes. It is the drippy-est piece on cricket/cricketers I have ever read, making me almost afraid of touching the wet page. Maybe it is a function of the language, I don't know, but this strain of cricket writing has got to go. In contrast, though by no means short on high-pitched lamentations about thrashings administered to various Indian teams on distant, and near, cricket grounds, though relying on prose that's first cousin to hack (the phrase 'leading from the front' for example, is used only about a thousand times), Ramchand's book rattles along jauntily. Lastly, it seems that in India sports journalists, especially those who publish books, tend to specialize in a single sport, i.e. cricket or football, while sports journalists here sally forth, even in booklength forms, on a wider range of topics.

At the end, however, one wishes sports writing in Bangladesh well, and especially that its cricket writing, side by side with its cricket team, matures and prospers. In both Bengali and English.

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