

Foreword

One of the notable moments of the triennial conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies held at Hyderabad in 2004 — and perhaps a no less notable moment in Professor Dieter Riemenschneider's long and distinguished career — came at the book-launch at that conference of his newly published work titled *Postcolonial Theory: The Emergence of a Critical Discourse: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography from the Beginnings to 1990* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2004). It was in a sense the compendium of his life's work, it carried a Preface by Homi Bhabha, and Bhabha himself came to a crowded room that evening to launch the book with a gracious speech.

Now no two critics can be more unlike than Homi Bhabha, the arch theorist, and Dieter Riemenschneider, the arch archivist, and yet, by bringing both these persons together, that happy occasion demonstrated how these two seemingly contrasted critical pursuits are necessary for each other. The value of Dieter's book was affirmed in two further incidents that followed. When the evening had concluded and the guests had all departed, it was found that besides the copies sold, four copies of the expensively priced book were missing. As Dieter cheerfully enough put it, "They grew feet and walked off!" Obviously, it was a volume worth begging, borrowing or stealing — to say nothing of buying. The other incident concerns a young lady in India who had once published an article on R.K. Narayan and then drifted away from research and academics, but when it was found that her singular contribution to scholarship had been canonized in a 'foreign' book, it was an occasion for her proud husband, a senior police officer, to give a grand party to all their friends. Dieter had ensured that she had her moment of internationally acknowledged fame.

In a book that followed, *The Indian Novel in English: Its Critical Discourse 1934–2004* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2005), Dieter provided a long historical introduction to the genre and then a discussion of the trends in the evolving criticism of each of the three novelists whose works he focused on, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao. I am the proud owner of a (feetless and therefore perfectly legitimate) copy of this work too, and in his inscription, Dieter modestly describes the book as "my attempts at mapping archival material; the reader as cartographer?"

This self-description appears quite apt, especially when we read of his efforts, ever since he first arrived in India in 1963 to teach German at the University of Panjab at Chandigarh and subsequently at the University of Delhi, to discover and buy copies of “stored away, dusty and yellowed copies of Indian novels [to be found in] far-flung places.” (ix) His own personal store now of hundreds of Indian novels in English and thousands upon thousands of the reviews and critical articles and books that they generated must be difficult to match not only in India but anywhere in the world.

But Dieter is not only an archivist, a cartographer and a collector of the Indian novel in English; he is also a tough and discriminating critic of this corpus in his own right. The present book, with its enticingly unacademic title, offers ample evidence of his critical bent. He is as assiduous a close reader of the texts as he is a bibliographer, and there is a quiet, undemonstrative firmness about his literary judgments. He does not bow to what the majority of Indian critics may have said, and such sturdy independence gives his own evaluations contrasting and added worth. He is widely read — and over a longer period than some young Indian critics who readily make what Dieter calls “sweeping generalizations” (75), and he does not hesitate to take to task even older Indian critics whom he finds to be either too “formalist” or “ideological”, or “ethnocentric” and “narrow-minded.” (1–5)

There is a special historical value to the earlier essays in this volume for they are focused on writers who were thought to be colossal giants in their own day but are a bit like desolate grand monuments now. Dieter also includes in his sweep some authors who were minor then and are all but forgotten now, such as Mary Erulkar or Meher Pestonji. He compares and contrasts authors who may be thought to be poles apart, such as Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie. He notes that William Hodges, the celebrated British painter of Indian landscapes, had earlier painted New Zealand landscapes as a fellow voyager with Captain James Cook. He breaks what for many of us is new ground when he surveys the Indian presence in Aotearoa New Zealand, a discovery apparently facilitated by the fact that his wife, the poet Jan Kemp who makes a fleeting appearance here (164), is from New Zealand. And he brings us up to date when he discusses in his last chapter a novel, *Animal's People*, which was published in 2008, and also refers to writers from the Indian languages whom he has read in translation, including Daya Pawar, Omprakash Valmiki and Uday Prakash.

Dieter Riemenschneider's engagement personally with India and professionally with the Indian novel in English is now more than 50 years

FOREWORD

old, a landmark which was recognized when the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies invited him to deliver the keynote address at its annual conference of 2014 held in Chandigarh, the new university where Dieter's India connection began in 1963. His has been a journey of slow and steady labour, quiet accumulation, and unflagging dedication. The present volume is a rich and ripe representation of the range of his erudition, and a fitting finale of his scholarly endeavour if that is what he means it to be.

Harish Trivedi
Delhi, April 2016

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Former Chair, Indian Association for Commonwealth
Literature and Language Studies

SURYASAMUDRA AFFAIR

The wicker chair neatly positioned
next to the glass-top wicker table
between two ancient stone-carved pillars
protected by Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva
in the Octagonal House
Suryasamudra Kerala

no wonder the mosquitoes are perplexed
about the place and undecided
where to settle for their food
nor do the palm-fronds undisturbed
by cawing crows care for this brood

yes, this arrangement pleases me
and so I ask to have my tea
while wondering
should I leave
would I grieve
for what must stay behind

and yet somehow I know
I'm not the one
who'll grow
sitting in wicker chairs
having tea affairs

Trivandrum
14 January 1994