

*Teeth*; mention of Marcus Chalfen's Jewish background, crucial to his position as a representative of British whiteness, is notably absent. However, significant ground is covered in the relatively limited space of a chapter; Jay's reading of Díaz, which extends the hemispheric approach advanced in chapter four, "Border Studies: Remapping the Locations of Literary Study," to trace the relationship between the novel's narrative juxtaposition of migration, violence, and masculinities, is an especially welcome critical take on a much-discussed novel.

Jay's careful recapitulation of the relevant scholarly debates about how best to historicize globalization, and whether to understand its logic and effects as primarily economic or cultural, acknowledges the necessity of these theoretical divergences for the development of rigorous analysis while suggesting that the most useful answer is more likely "both/and" rather than "either/or". In particular, both chapter two, "What is Globalization?" and chapter three, "Economies, Cultures, and the Politics of Globalization," have clear pedagogical value thanks to their lucid style and ability to synthesize divergent theoretical strands while offering a clear, forcefully argued position without the distraction of polemics.

Miriam Novick

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*Speaking for Myself: An Anthology of Asian Women's Writing.* Edited by Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar. Foreword by Kapila Vatsyayan. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009. 584 pp. Pb. Rs.650, C\$ 20.

The India International Centre at Delhi, a non-profit and autonomous non-government body, was founded almost fifty years ago. In its charter, the I.I.C. declares its purpose as "promoting understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or enhancing knowledge thereof and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal application." The I.I.C. launched the I.I.C.-Asia Project in the nineteen-nineties for reviving and strengthening the historic, cultural and intellectual linkages among the countries of Asia. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, the Chairman of the I.I.C., invited Professor Malashri Lal and Professor Sukrita Paul Kumar to compile an anthology of Asian women's writing. The editors have mentioned the difficulties they faced in this endeavour. Bookstores and libraries in Asia are poor in literature from Asian countries. They had to turn to the West to

locate translators and source material. Also, there are few direct translations from one Asian language to another. It is ironic that this anthology is in English, the language of the colonizer of many Asian countries. The editors have pointed out the loss that translation entails, but it is outweighed by the benefits of presenting texts from so many languages in a single volume.

The anthology contains 74 pieces from 34 countries, from Japan in the east to Israel, Lebanon and Palestine in the west, from Mongolia and Russia in the north to Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines in the south. The anthology is divided into five sections: East Asia (including Macau, Taiwan and Tibet), South-East Asia (with eight countries, including Cambodia and Myanmar), South Asia (the longest section, with 22 pieces), Central Asia and Russia, and West Asia. There are 42 prose pieces, but just one play, perhaps because of lack of available translations, and also, I suspect, because of the problem of extracting a meaningful short excerpt from a full-length play. Almost all the prose pieces are translated, but many of the poems (16 out of 31) are originally written in English.

This pioneering anthology challenges the stereotypical image of Asian women as passive and submissive. Though the social, economic and cultural background differs from country to country, the writing reflects many common concerns—motherhood and the task of nurturing children, unequal gender relations, and the common struggles a single woman faces. The short story from Russia, Maria Arbatova's "I Am Called a Woman," recounts the horrifying experiences of a young girl delivering twins; she is a student of philosophy and just nineteen years old. She receives little care or love at the crowded Institute of Gynaecology. The story ends on a sad note: "For in our world being a woman is not a respectable thing, even at that moment, when a woman does that one single job, which the man is simply not capable of doing" (474).

Many of the pieces in the anthology show women fighting against gender discrimination. Heng Siok Tian's "Journal Week" from Singapore is a poem in seven parts. It begins with images of deprivation: "I crammed / into hand-me-down shoes / learning to stride graceful / with big flat feet, / taking light dainty steps / with bones crushed by foot-binding" (278). However, Section VI declares: "I decide: / not to live / in a fairy-tale castle / awaiting rescue, / witness the unsung tragedies of / heroines, maids, beaten wives, / see myself in my sisters / equally born / of sinful apples" (279).

"The Purification of Sita," a story by the Indonesian writer Leila S. Chudori, addresses double standards. The protagonist has spent four lonely years in Canada, turning aside friendly men with the plea "I'm not going to sleep with a man who is not my husband" (244). When her fiancé comes

to meet her, images of the trial by fire that Sita is subjected to in Valmiki's *Ramayana* flash before her eyes. Her fiancé complacently takes her fidelity for granted for "women seem to be more capable of exercising self-control" (241). As for men, he confesses, "Society grants us complete freedom to give free rein to our desires" (248).

In the stories from India, the sufferings of women appear manifold. Mahasweta Devi's story "Giribala" (translated from Bengali) suggests that "even now, it is customary to pay for the bride's hand in marriage" (323). Giribala is hardly fourteen years when her father gives her in marriage to Aullchand who pretends to be well employed. Giribala works hard as domestic help "for a meal wage." She knows that leaving her husband is not an option as "A girl's by fate discarded, lost if she's dead, lost if she's wed" (329). Giribala gives birth to two girls and a boy within five years. A third daughter is born a few years later. When her daughter Bela is ten years old, Giribala starts thinking of arranging her marriage, but the drunkard and drug addict Aullchand sells Bela and their second daughter Pari into prostitution. Following this, Giribala walks out with her youngest daughter Maruni in her arms, clasping the hand of her son Rajiv. But the community condemns Giribala for this brave step:

The news amazes everyone, sets their heads shaking in disapproval. What happened to Bela and Pari was common practice these days. But why leave your husband and go away? What kind of woman was that?

Everyone is convinced that it's not Aullchand but Giribala who's at fault. An indescribable relief fills them, all of them, when they reach this conclusion. (340)

Giribala's only regret is that she did not take this step earlier—Bela and Pari would have been saved.

Poverty plays a big part in Giribala's misery. But money alone does not make for happiness. In "The Stigma" by Pratibha Ray, beautiful Sarami is married to a man old enough to be her father when her future husband's nephew rejects her because her father cannot afford to give a dowry. People think that she is lucky: "A woman's good fortune was judged by the social standing of her husband, the amount of jewellery she could laden herself with, the quality of food she ate, the weave of the clothes she wore—her state of mind, happiness, emotional fulfilment, wishes all counted for nothing. Better that way, otherwise poor Sarami would have chosen to drown herself" (373). She refuses to succumb to the sexual overtures of her old husband's handsome brother or nephew, but her suppressed sexuality breaks out as fits of hysteria.

## Book Reviews

Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar are to be congratulated for opening a window to Asian women's writing. In their introduction, they point out that "The selections here are not necessarily representative of writings from different Asian countries but it is hoped that they will serve as a take-off point for further explorations" (xx). Their assertion that "This book is only going to whet the taste for literature from Asia" is perfectly true.

Shyamala A. Narayan