

Elegantly written, Zecchini's compelling tribute to Arun Kolatkar and the Bombay Bohemian scene in post-independence India organically embeds sample texts which reveal their own aesthetic potential. In addition to exhaustive archival resources, the author draws on numerous anecdotes and information from Kolatkar's circle of friends and fellow poets, most prominently Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. This adds an entertaining touch to this narrative of the pioneer of modernism in India. By integrating a non-Western artist in the canon of literary modernism, Zecchini reminds us once more that modernism as an imaginative mind-set and creative mode of expression was not limited to European avant-garde(s) or American popular culture. More importantly, her study helps us to appreciate how global modernism in the 20th century, despite transcending geographical, cultural and linguistic borders, produced independent forms and varieties "in conversation" with vernacular narrative traditions in South Asia – a relationship still to be discovered in much more detail.

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KONRAD MEISIG (ed.): *Utopias from Asia. An International and Interdisciplinary Symposium in Santiniketan on the Occasion of the 150th Birthday Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. An Asian Impact Activity in Memoriam of Momoyo Okura.* (East Asia Intercultural Studies / Interkulturelle Ostasienstudien, 8). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012. Xxvi, 205 pages, €54.00. ISBN 978-3-447-06794-2

The articles in this volume derive from two separate international and interdisciplinary workshops, one bearing the title of the volume – "Utopias from Asia" – which took place in October 2011 in Santiniketan, India; the other with the even more general title "Myths from Asia" half a year later, in February 2012 at Mainz University in Germany. The papers from the second workshop are compiled in a separate "Supplement Section". The volume also contains an editor's preface, explaining Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birthday in 2011 as the incentive for a workshop on "Utopias from Asia"; welcoming addresses from the workshop; and the well-informed keynote speech by Udaya Narayana Singh, the then Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan. His inaugural talk naturally discusses the Visva-Bharati University as a realisation of the utopian vision of Rabindranath Tagore as a humanist and educationist. Singh interprets Tagore as an "author-musician-painter-activist-linguist turned cultural leader who tried to combine different and divergent traditions – Indian, Western as well as East Asian" (p. xxv). From this perspective, Singh does not challenge the common reverential rhetoric which regards Tagore as a cultural harbinger, one whose modernist aim was to transform reality according to a vision (i.e. utopia).

The nicely proofread and laid out volume – only one remark from the layout phase has somehow survived correction and made it into the final version (p. 56) – is a collection containing very different contributions from the two workshops mentioned. Both of them operate with rather fuzzy conceptual frameworks. There is hardly any effort to link up the wide range of material from different contexts into a cohesive whole. Some contributions remain close to the original oral presentation during the workshop and contain only stray references and footnotes, whereas others can be considered as standard academic papers.

The regions covered range from Santiniketan in West Bengal to East Asia, and the subjects explored range from the Pali texts of the Buddhist canon to modern and contemporary East Asian films. The articles on Rabindranath Tagore try somehow to link rather conventional views on Tagore to the general subject of “utopia”, in the sense of a general guideline for moulding reality into a form that supports human progress in a sustainable manner. Several articles refer back to dictionary definitions and the etymology of the term “utopia”, beginning with Thomas More’s book of the same name from 1516.

These general criticisms notwithstanding, one can find worthy contributions in the volume, in particular: the articles by Kasturi Dadhe; the interesting links between epochs and regions that Konrad Meisig refers to in his remarks; Sonja Wengoborski’s comparative study of two contemporary authors, one writing in Sinhalese and one in Hindi; Almuth Degener’s reading of Qurratulain Hyder; and, last but not least, the contributions on aspects of East Asian film.

The workshop in India was organised in memory of the Japanese entrepreneur Momoyo Okura, whose daughter Masako Sato contributed a paper on the friendship of her grandfather, the industrialist Kunihiko Okura (1882–1972), with Rabindranath Tagore, who lived with the Okura family during his first visit to Japan in 1929. Konrad Meisig, in his first article “Utopia – A Definition”, tries to define the meaning of utopia on the basis of a substantial definition of religion as “the quest for otherworldly bliss” (p. 7). The main part of his article is on Mahatma Gandhi’s utopian vision for a decentralised India after independence.

Similarly, Kumkum Bhattacharya (“Utopias in Praxis. Rabindranath’s Rural Reconstruction”) sees the utopian vision as a kind of leading idea for a particular social-political project, in this case the idea of a rural university, i.e. Santiniketan, in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore. Bhattacharya even sees in the Santiniketan of the post-independence area – with Visva-Bharati University becoming a Central University in 1951 – a continual “testimony to the vision of the poet” (p. 17). Swati Ganguly in her article on “Santiniketan and Sriniketan” also follows this line, but she goes more into the development project close to Santiniketan in Surul village, later known as Sriniketan, as a project of rural “reconstruction” or “regeneration”. The central idea of Sriniketan, according to Ganguly, is not the idea of progress, but rather of economic self-sufficiency. There is one more article on Tagore, by Soumik Nandy Majumdar (pp. 53–57),

which tries to reconcile the utopian vision of Tagore with the rather depressing expressions of his late paintings.

Kasturi Dadhe examines “The Concept of a Feminine-Self” in three works in English and Bengali by the 1880-born Bengali author Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Hossain’s novel *Sultana’s Dream* appeared in 1905 in English, a neglected early feminist novel in modern Bengali literature. *Sultana’s Dream* is narrated as the dream of Sister Sara of the “Ladyland”, a kind of utopian vision of a land where women rule over men. Love and truth are the leading ideas of social organisation in Ladyland. The second novel, *Padmarāg* (1924), is written in Bengali and here too, utopian female companionship is a central theme. The third book analysed, *Abarodhbāsinī*, is a collection of journalistic text productions, written between 1928 and 1930 and focused on the social reality of Muslim women in Bengal at that time.

Luong Van Ke’s contribution “From Utopia to Reality” is focused on the political and economic developments in Vietnam since 1990. The author sees particularly the decisions of the 9th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2001 as a path designed to lead from utopia to reality – a planned development “to turn a poor, backward and authoritarian country into a rich, strong, progressive, and democratic nation, that is: To make a Utopia become a reality” (p. 51).

In his second article in the volume, Konrad Meisig examines the textual evidence of Buddhist utopias. First of all he looks at the well-known Agganna myth, a kind of anti-brahman version of the beginning of mankind as an egalitarian society, which is later drawn into a decline that results in the hierarchical setup of the contemporary society of the Buddha. This Buddhist vision of the egalitarian origin of mankind in a paradise called Uttarakuru inspired the Buddhist convert, Hindi author and critical thinker Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963), particularly in his autobiographical novel *Simha Senāpati* from 1951. Meisig draws further links to the Korean Buddhist monk Yulgok (1536–1584) and the Thai reform Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906–1993), whose social vision was driven by an ideal Buddhist society, which would eliminate the categories of “I” and “me” in favour of the common good for everyone, which Meisig tries to formulate as the basis of a socially engaged Buddhism driven by a utopian vision.

Marion Meisig discusses in “Unity of Politics and Nature” the mythical animal Qilin, part of Chinese culture since the Han epoch, a “mythical beast” and symbol of “the manifestation of perfect harmony between Heaven, the Highest Principle, and the government” simultaneously – and at the same time a symbolic image of a utopian society (p. 73). This is followed by two contributions on utopia and dystopia in Japanese films: Ivo Ritzer (“Against the Modern World: The *ninkyō eiga* as Nostalgic Utopia”) and Marcus Stiglegger (“*Kaijū eiga*: Utopias and Dystopias in Japanese Cinema”), as well as an article by Sonja Wengoborski with an interesting comparison of the utopian in contemporary literature in Sinhala and Hindi.

The “Supplement Section – Myths from Asia” (pp. 111–186), which follows, contains six contributions from a second workshop under the broad framework “Myths from Asia”. Kasturi Dadhe’s article is an interesting contribution on the complexities of a tribal creation myth of the Bhil. Almuth Degener writes on the construction of a mythic history spanning 2,500 years in the famous Urdu novel *Āg kā daryā* by Qurratulain Hyder. Degener relates her interpretation to the subject of the volume, since the novel reveals a “utopia of a golden age, consisting of the peaceful coexistence of free and equal citizens” (p. 124) in contrast to the deep enmity in the present hostile relationship between India and Pakistan.

Ivo Ritzer, in his second contribution “Legends of the Fist” focuses on nationalism and transnationalism in the myth of the superhero in films from China and Hong Kong, while Hans Ruelius discusses the mythic origins of the *yakṣa* in traditional Sinhalese literature, particularly in the *Licchavikathā* (story of the Licchavi clan). Masako Sato’s article describes the symbolic dimension of the spider and her net in traditional Japanese literature, while Markus Stiglegger analyses the myths of the everyday in the film *Mythopoetic* of the contemporary Japanese film director Mamoru Oshii. The last section of the book contains pictures, which relate to some of the articles.

All in all, the volume provides a multi-faceted and entertaining overview of various interpretations of the utopian and the mythological from both ancient and modern Asia and is a fine contribution to the intercultural landscape.

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ELLEN WILES, *Saffron Shadows and Salvaged Scripts. Literary Life in Myanmar under Censorship and in Transition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 288 pages, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-2311-7328-5

Over decades of military rule, Myanmar developed an extremely harsh censorship regime that had a profound impact on developments in literature – writers gained fame for creative ways of coding their messages that were unintelligible to the censors. Paradoxically, censorship had at once a very restrictive impact on Myanmar literature and was at the same time, as one writer phrased it, “the best thing that happened to it” (p. 235), unwittingly forcing writerly creativity and encouraging “public lust for books that are forbidden fruits, which goes hand in hand with intense respect for writers” (p. 251). But what has happened to Myanmar’s literary scene since the end of prepublication censorship in 2012? Ellen Wiles’s book, an “ethnographic investigation of literary culture in Myanmar” (p. 1), sets out to answer this question.

At the core of the book are the accounts of nine writers speaking about their experiences of living, writing and publishing under the censorship regime and