

Literature to combat cultural chauvinism

From Indian Literature to World Literature: A Conversation with Satya P. Mohanty, Professor of English at Cornell University. **By Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar and Rajender Kaur**

HOW should readers and critics approach the idea of 'Indian literature' – or, for that matter, "world literature"? This wide-ranging conversation explores that question. It also asks how a genuinely comparative study of the regional traditions in the various Indian languages can be conceived. Within the context of these two questions, it delves into more general issues: Can literary criticism be seen as part of a collaborative project in which historians, philosophers, and social scientists participate as potential interlocutors or even partners? How are "theories" such as postmodernism and philosophical realism relevant to the study of Indian literature and culture?

Satya P. Mohanty, Professor of English at Cornell University, has written extensively about philosophical and literary realism as well as contemporary approaches to Indian literature. He is also well known for his critical introduction to the 2005 translation of Fakir Mohan Senapati's ground-breaking realist novel *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, first serialised in Oriya in 1897-99 (*Six Acres and a Third* [University of California Press, 2005; Penguin-India, 2006]). Set in a village in colonial Orissa, the novel traces the rise and fall of a rapacious landlord, Ramachandra Mangaraj. Far from fitting into the stereotype of the sleepy little village as the timeless essence of an ancient and pre-modern Asian civilisation, however, the village in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* emerges as the site of profound changes unleashed by the Permanent Settlement of 1793 in the territories of Orissa, Bengal and Bihar. Mohanty's work on debates about realism took a new turn with *Colonialism, Modernity and*

Literature: A View from India (henceforth *CML*). This anthology of essays is notable for the fact that scholars working in a variety of traditions of literary realism – English, Hindi, Telugu, Assamese, and Latin American Spanish – made cross-regional and transnational comparisons using Senapati’s novel as a point of departure. Mohanty’s editorial introduction in *CML* suggested to social scientists and literary critics that early realist novels in Indian vernaculars of the colonial period can give us insights into alternative modernities that do not necessarily adhere to the model provided by Euro-American modernity, which is closely tied to the rise of capitalism. (The following interview was done during October and November 2011. The two interviewers teach literature at American universities: Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar is a Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Centre of the University of Pittsburgh, and Rajender Kaur, the current president of the South Asian Literary Association, is Associate Professor of English at William Patterson University. This interview appeared earlier this month in the U.S. in *South Asian Review*; a Hindi translation will be published in the next issue of *Alochana*.)

We wanted to begin by asking you about your new edited volume, *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India*, which offers a model for comparative Indian literary studies. It seems like it has taken several years to produce this collection, and the inspiration for it came from the talks U.R. Ananthamurthy gave at Cornell in 2000.

Yes, it has been exciting to collaborate with scholars from various linguistic traditions in India as well as American critics who specialise in European and Latin American literatures. But the inspiration definitely came from U.R. Ananthamurthy and his humane and cosmopolitan vision of literary studies. Our collection of essays is dedicated to him. His

talks at Cornell dealt with a number of subjects but were based in part on a comparative study of Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (1897-99) and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1907-09), both of which had influenced Ananthamurthy.

We'd like to return in detail to the implications of your work on Indian literature, but can we ask you first about the connections between your theoretical work and your translation and interpretation of Indian texts? You've been working on philosophical realism for over two decades now, and have recently started writing about literary realism. Can you tell us about the connections you see between "theoretical realism" and literary realism? Your work conveys the sense that there are serious flaws in existing linkages between literary criticism and the broader intellectual current that combines humanistic research with social inquiry. You imply that students and scholars cannot take these links for granted and have to rethink them. In this broader project what is the role assigned to realism in your work?

I think the best way to understand the connections between philosophical or theoretical realism and literary realism is to focus on what each says, explicitly or implicitly, about knowledge – about how we come to know things, especially in the social realm. Can we ever be objective in our understanding of social phenomena? Can we overcome socially produced distortions, especially those created by the dominant ideologies, and arrive at more accurate accounts, accounts that can be considered reliable?

Let me develop this idea by explaining how I, a literary critic, first became interested in philosophical realism – and in these questions in particular.

In the mid-1980s I was working, like many others around me, to integrate the tantalising claims of poststructuralist theory with the various traditions of materialist and social-critical thought with which we were all familiar – Marxism, feminism, etc. But I came to realise that while poststructuralism, as we knew it in the context of literary studies, raised interesting questions it had no way of providing adequate answers to some of them.

The deepest of these questions arose from poststructuralism's critique of foundationalism, exemplified in Derrida's deconstruction of the Husserlian concept of "presence", a concept that had taken for granted that there may be a bedrock level of experience or observation where we can be absolutely certain that we know something. Poststructuralism's critique of foundationalism was enabled, as was the case with earlier developments in analytic philosophy, by the recognition that no such bedrock level of experience exists, since everything – an individual's personal experiences to scientific observations in the laboratory – is available to us only in profoundly mediated ways. Everything, as philosophers of science say, is necessarily theory-dependent.

The first major question that arose from this recognition is this: Since all knowledge is so profoundly mediated, isn't objective knowledge impossible to achieve? Isn't all knowledge relative to a given perspective? Isn't, as the argument sometimes goes (see Lyotard on this topic), a kind of epistemological relativism the most reasonable position to adopt?

This is the question I wrote about in the late 1980s – on relativism, and whether it was a viable and desirable epistemological stance (my essay on this, "Us and Them", appeared in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* in 1989, later anthologised in a few places). Writing this essay led me to an examination of recent versions of philosophical realism, which posit that objective knowledge is possible – but that our early 20th century notions of foundationalist

certainty need to be abandoned and our notion of objectivity needs to be reconfigured, made more hermeneutical and reflexive. On this view, genuine objectivity is not mere neutrality. We achieve objectivity by looking at the epistemic implications of different subjective perspectives, of our cultural biases, ideologies, and social locations. In exploring these issues, I was learning from debates in analytic philosophy surrounding the work of Thomas Kuhn, the historian and philosopher of science.

So both philosophical realism and literary realism are concerned with some form of objectivity?

Yes, there clearly is a similarity between philosophical realism and literary realism because the latter, much like the former, often seeks a more objective view of (social and cultural) reality, and realist writers often talk about how they are trying to correct the representations of the dominant genres and conventions. You see evidence of that view in, for instance, George Eliot's call to go beyond what she calls "fancy" (a fanciful representation is so "easy", she says) and in Senapati's implicit critique of Lal Behary Day's static, orientalist ("easy") representation of the Indian village. Early realist writers say they are trying to achieve greater fidelity to things as they are – that is, going beyond existing representations that are ideological or distorted for some other reason. Their concern is with greater objectivity or greater truth than what the hegemonic perspectives allow us to glean – but it is not with some notion of absolute descriptive fidelity to nature. The best realist writers tend to provide an analysis of reality, and their redescrptions of the world are meant to support their analysis.

While there is a clear analogy to be drawn between the project of philosophical or epistemological realism and that of some strands of literary realism, no necessary

connection exists between theoretical postmodernism (which includes what we call poststructuralism) and literary postmodernism. Literary postmodernism refers to the textual, and in particular narrative, features and conventions that literary historians have identified as having emerged after the decline of literary modernism. Literary postmodernism is a term drawn from literary history whereas theoretical postmodernism is an epistemological, and more generally philosophical, stance or view.

You can be a postmodernist novelist or poet, and that is how editors may categorise you to fit you in the appropriate anthology. But whether you are a postmodernist in the philosophical sense would not be clear from that fact alone. A writer can be using postmodern literary conventions while pursuing a philosophical-realist project – a project that seeks to unmask social distortions and reveal a more objective version of reality. You can adopt the narrative modes of Pynchon or Rushdie and simultaneously pursue George Eliot's goals in writing fiction. You can play with and even subvert conventions of literary realism and still be a philosophical realist at heart. In the mid-1980s, Kum Kum Sangari wrote a superb analysis of Rushdie and García Marquez along these lines, urging readers to reconsider their notion that the latter's use of magical realism is anti-realist. And if you read Jennifer Harford Vargas's 2009 essay on García Marquez in *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), you will see the same basic thesis. Both critics argue in effect that magical realist writers often have a realist epistemology, which means that they are trying to get closer to objective social reality.

This is one of the reasons why Fakir Mohan Senapati's novel *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, written in colonial India in the late 1890s, is such an interesting text. It is written in an allusive, parodic mode that suggests what we literary critics call postmodernism, but

underneath that mode – and indeed through those very subversive narrative conventions – Senapati develops a rich descriptive and analytical account of colonial Indian society and culture. So he is a (philosophical) realist writing in a mode that has postmodernist characteristics – and this is 60 or 70 years before the advent of the postmodernist novel in the West!

In your introduction to *Six Acres and a Third* you talk about how Senapati challenges the reader to be “active” rather than a passive consumer of a social reality presented to him or her, a reality that is pre-made and fully formed. Part of the startling modernity of Senapati’s *Six Acres and a Third* (as well as, we would argue, of Balram Das’s 16th century feminist *Lakshmi Purana*, which you have also analysed in detail) lies in their meta-fictional narrative form, and particularly in the collaborative activist role these texts impose on the reader in performing their critique of existing structures of social and political power. We are intrigued by your reading of this role as the ascription of epistemic/narrative authority where the act of sifting fable from fact and ideological posturing from truth emerges as “epistemic virtue”. Senapati’s strategy of unsettling the reader is both empowering and disorienting. Would you agree that the kind of intellectual nimbleness in the realist narrative in these texts, and the expectations it places on the reader of a certain kind of ethical interrogation of themselves as individuals and of social practices and institutions, seems to emerge almost as an ethical imperative?

Balaram Das’s feminist and anti-caste purana is a living tradition in Orissa (now officially spelled Odisha, by the way, after the November 2011 parliamentary legislation). The

Lakshmi Purana is read ritually in the month of Margashira by women in every Hindu household, in just about every village and town. Balaram Das was a radical saint-poet and his primary achievement in this poem is to have created this new subversive tale and a corresponding social tradition: for over 450 years, women have been reciting this text, discussing it with other women, and analysing the story's anti-caste and feminist implications. This tradition creates a radical social and political space, one that can be used for all kinds of progressive purposes.

Senapati's novel may or may not have come out of the same activist tradition (although at least one feminist scholar, Bidyut Mohanty of Delhi University, has argued that it was influenced indirectly by the Lakshmi Purana). But its narrator is more than a neutral conduit for the story. Much more important than the story is the narrator's stance as a wily but trenchant social critic, and it is this that readers learn to appreciate as they read and reread the novel. The wit and humour do serious critical and epistemic work. Part of what I wanted to show, aligning myself with such Oriya (now "Odia") critics as Rabi Shankar Mishra, who had already provided a Bakhtinian and Derridean reading of the novel, is that the centre of the text's energy lies in its reinvention of both language and narrative mode. It is much more than a story about a landlord's rapacity. (By the way, U.R. Ananthamurthy saw this quite early, even though he read *Six Acres* only in translation.) Senapati's novel is a realist achievement on a number of levels. As Sisir Kumar Das and others have said, it provides a detailed and accurate picture of colonial Indian society from the rural perspective. But, as I argued in my introduction, the accuracy of this picture is not primarily descriptive but rather critical and analytical.

There is a stageist mentality in debates around literary realism that operates on a linear notion of time within which each piece of literature builds on its immediate predecessor. Yet you seem to align yourself with non-linear notions of literary-historical time by stating in your critical introduction that the realism of *Chha Mana Atha Gantha* "is closer to the reflexive postmodernism of a Salman Rushdie than it is to the naturalism of a Mulk Raj Anand". Would you agree that the stageist notion of literary realism belonged to an earlier era, when realism was too closely bound up with the stages of history associated with Hegelian Marxism? Conversely, new work on literary realism in world literature is accompanied by a notion of world literary time that deploys the idiom of anticipations, of subversions of linear time. The political power of literary realism depends in great measure on the relation between realism, temporality and human history, hence our question.

Yes, we definitely need to go beyond naïve models of progress and development in literature and culture. So, instead of seeing the history of the Indian novel as one of steady progress toward greater and greater sophistication, from crude realism to self-conscious postmodernism, magical realism, etc., we have to become more aware of the levels of analytical and epistemic work that realism of various kinds have done, as they have engaged their times – their realities – in textually specific ways.

Another – and more complex – model can be derived from the way literature often anticipates the discoveries of critical social science. This is certainly true of the realist novel in India. Vasudha Dalmia makes this point about Premchand in her preface to the English translation of *Godaan*. Dalmia and others are right: literature often anticipates by

decades the insights and findings of historians and social thinkers, and we literary critics can help build a multi-disciplinary project that will explore what we may call, echoing E.P. Thompson's 1966 *Times Literary Supplement* essay, the "literary view from below". (Thompson's famous manifesto was titled "History From Below", as you know.) By the way, the 2006 special section of *EPW* that Harish Trivedi and I co-edited alluded to that historiographical project by using the phrase "literary view from below" in the title – and so did the two comparative Indian literature conferences that we co-organised (with the political scientist Manoranjan Mohanty) in India and the U.S. – at the University of Delhi in January 2007 and at Cornell in May 2008.

You have encouraged readers to think of Senapati's realism as more "analytical" than "descriptive". The notion of analytical realism you propose appears to have had two kinds of influence. Firstly, analytical realism functions as a placeholder for dissatisfaction with received ways of thinking about realism. We see evidence of this in the work of Sawyer, Mohapatra and Narayana Rao, among others: realism signifies their reasoned unease with the spectrum of intellectual positions available to the critic. There is in their work a refusal to abandon the term realism while putting it to work in altogether new ways. Secondly, analytical realism radically alters the protocols of analysis in novel studies, since we no longer have to try to fit realist novels in Indian and African vernaculars into available categories of European realism.

The distinction between descriptive and analytical realism is meant to echo the distinction Georg Lukács made between novels that are "naturalistic", with plenty of descriptive details but without explanatory depth, and those other novels (such as Balzac's) that are

“realist” in a deeper sense, since they provide accounts of underlying social and historical trends, and of forces that are causally more salient than what we perceive on the surface of a given culture. Lukács’s distinction is valuable, even though his own application of his theoretical insight to works of literature was not always successful. His tastes limited him, and his responses – in particular to some early modernist writers in Europe – are clunky and misleading. But for our purposes it is useful to focus on the distinction between a more descriptive realist novel and a more analytical one, since it allows us to appreciate more fully the epistemic work novels perform – even at the level of their formal innovations. I argued – and many critics have developed this point – that Senapati’s narrator is a major literary invention, drawing as it does on oral and socio-cultural traditions, and it is Senapati’s narrative mode that enables him to create a deeper form of realism than would be possible through mere mimesis, through faithful description of the changing surfaces of social phenomena. The narrator of *Six Acres* forces us to be active readers, engaged in decoding not so much the details of the plot as the social prejudices and ideologies that distort our understanding of our world. The novel can be called “postmodernist” in a literary-critical sense, but its achievement is profoundly realist – in the philosophical sense of the term.

Paul Sawyer has developed this idea in writing about George Eliot and Senapati, as has Himansu Mohapatra in comparing *Six Acres* with Premchand’s *Godaan*. See, also, Ulka Anjaria’s 2006 *EPW* essay on Shrilal Shukla and Senapati, as well as Jennifer Harford Vargas’s comparative study of Senapati and Garcia Marquez. There are similar ideas in Narayana Rao’s comparative analysis as well as in Tilottoma Misra’s work on Barua and Senapati (Barua was writing some 20 years before Senapati, in Asamiya). My view is that every one of these essays I’ve mentioned can inspire a multi-year research project –

leading to dissertations and books that explore the question of descriptive vs. analytical realism in greater historical detail and depth, and we will learn a lot about literary realism, especially in the Indian context, through such studies. The same can be said about Sangari's 1980s essay on Rushdie and García Marquez, which I mentioned earlier, or Mukti Lakhi Mangharam's detailed comparative analysis, in *EPW* (2010), of the Odia adivasi poet Bhima Bhoi and Swami Vivekananda.

So, to return to the second implication of your point about analytical realism: realism in 19th century India is a literary mode that is sometimes used to explore the working out of an anti-colonial critical consciousness from subaltern perspectives? You are in effect shifting attention – from European critical concerns about objective reality, social conflict, rise of the bourgeois classes and the bourgeois world view – towards a greater focus on realist projects underlying the narrator's voice, tone, all seeing eye, mode of satiric commentary, withholdings and silences and disclosures. Is realism at one level simply the close encounter between the performative voice of such traditions as the Odia and Assamese pala and the anti-babu critic of Sanskritic and modern learning? Where can this kind of analysis of realism take us? What can it make us see?

I don't want to generalise too quickly about all realist novels, since there is a lot more historical and textual work that needs to be done. But one strand of this kind of analysis will certainly tell us a lot about subaltern agency, and take us beyond the kind of hyperbolic scepticism we often hear about when subaltern thoughts and ideas are discussed in literary-theoretical circles. So while it may be wise to suggest that in some contexts, for reasons that may be partly obscure, the subaltern's perspective is rendered

invisible by the dominant discourses about it, an overly general—decontextualised—scepticism about subalterns is unwarranted. The question about subaltern agency can never be purely, or primarily, a theoretical one. There is a lot of empirical knowledge that we lack, and we need reflexive and context-sensitive theoretical tools to gain access to some of it. Here is where the work of historians and other social scientists is so important, and the kind of literary analysis the critics you refer to are doing becomes relevant. There isn't a trace of that hyperbolic scepticism in such classic works as Thompson's on the "moral economy of the crowd" (1971) or in James Scott's on "weapons of the weak". And take a look at how careful and reflexive Eric Hobsbawm is when he writes about "grassroots history", grounding scepticism in real contexts of research, ideological prejudice, and theoretical method (the essay, first published in 1985, is called "History From Below – Some Reflections"). So the kind of exaggerated scepticism we often see in some poststructuralist circles is not the only form scepticism can take. There are alternatives to a general, broad-brush sceptical stance. Here is where literary critics can make useful interventions. Before literary critics conclude that the subaltern cannot, in fact, speak, or that we won't be able to understand what s/he is saying, it would be good to ask, for instance, what literary forms – drawing on oral performative traditions – show us about the kinds of critique that have been developed in our rich regional, vernacular literatures. Reading the Asamiya writer Hemchandra Barua together with Fakir Mohan Senapati can help focus our analysis of this, as is suggested by Tilottoma Mishra's critical essay in *CML*. (Or you could extend the analysis of orality and the novel across continents by doing a comparative study of the narrative mode of Senapati's novel and that of Amos Tutuola's 1952 work *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, which is based on Yoruba folktales.)

To go back to something you say, I should point out that my emphasis on the narrative styles, techniques and modes is certainly not a denial that objective social reality is important for the realist novel. All I am saying is that in literature the representation of objective reality is not achieved by holding a mirror up to nature, by describing all the minute details we see; as the novels we are discussing show us, the “how” of representation is often laden with epistemic significance. Indian and African novels, as well as the traditional – folk – forms they drew on, need to be analysed with this in mind.

Let’s turn to the subject of translation, especially your collaborative translation of *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*. Were there occasions when the four of you, the translators, got stuck in the difficulty of rendering in English the deliberately uneven and bumpy allusive surface of Senapati’s novel? Did you forge strategies for translating the oral, performative and gestural dimensions of the novel – most notably the range of tonalities adopted by the narrator from mock deferential, openly or obliquely sceptical or coy refusal to make judgments? Your introduction offers some clues about the translation zone. For instance, you describe in the introduction how the passage on the village pond and women’s conversations at the pond is itself a parodic translation of an Orientalist anthropological account by Reverend Lal Behari Day. We wonder then if the processes of translation led you and your fellow translators to the notion that the realism of early realist novels in 19th century India is not a solid and stable surface but a series of tectonic layers of translations of texts of a number of languages.

Yes, of course we often got stuck while translating this novel, as you can imagine. The process was far from easy. Given the layered nature of Senapati's language, which includes everything from the most familiar peasant speech to upper-caste Sanskritised versions of Odia, from Persian-inflected diction to direct echoes of English and Sanskrit as languages of power and authority, not to mention the unexpected shifts of tone from the plain and straightforward to the ironic and parodic, we knew that any English translation would necessarily involve a considerable amount of flattening. (The earlier translation into Hindi is excellent, by the way, and so, I am told, is the Telugu one. Some readers of the Bangla translation have complained to me that much of the tonal range is lost in it, perhaps because the dominant literary dialect of Bangla is the high Sanskritic "purified" or "sadhu" form of the language.)

Since we wanted the final version to reach a wide audience, to be read by all interested readers and not just academic specialists, we decided to provide only the most essential footnotes, with a glossary at the end. Our editor at the University of California Press, Linda Norton, had told me that my introduction needed to address the world-wide non-academic audience that would be encountering this book for the first time, and I am glad I had that in mind in thinking about how to pitch the discussion. The only thing I would do differently now is to say, even more bluntly, "Do read this novel at least twice. You will most probably focus on the story the first time and not quite get what is most interesting about the book."

Anyway, when Paul St. Pierre and I first became involved in the project, the early draft of the translation we saw was very rough but it captured fairly well the multi-layered Bakhtinian rhythm and tone of Senapati's book – and this was understandable, since it

reflected the interpretation Rabi Shankar Mishra had already provided in essays he had published in both English and Odia (that draft of the translation was done by Mishra jointly with Jatindra Nayak). Our goal was to revise that draft rigorously to make it as accurate a rendering of Senapati's Odia as possible, while keeping it fairly easy to read – in terms of idiom and style. But we also decided to keep some words untranslated, partly because some of them ("nabata" is an early one, for instance) don't have English equivalents, although what they refer to would be clear from the context. Then there were words – for instance "kos", which is roughly two kilometres – that we left untranslated because these were common terms in Senapati's time but are no longer in use (many contemporary Odia speakers would not understand them), and we wanted to emphasise the historical distance between Senapati's time and ours. Finally, of course, we had to find terms that would have resonance for non-Indian readers of English. So the word for the "charita" genre was rendered allusively, and we translated "Ramachandra Mangaraj Charita" as "The Life of Ramachandra Mangaraj", the capitalised letters pointing subtly to the Lives of Saints genre in the West. The narrator is being ironic there, we know, and readers would miss the irony if we translated "charita" more literally as biography.

Some things had to be translated and explained through detailed footnotes, which I worked on at the very final stage of the translation, together with Rabi Shankar Mishra, with helpful suggestions from our copy editor at the University of California Press. The allusions to the Nyaya school of Indian philosophy are more pervasive than had initially appeared to us, and we needed to draw attention to that allusive layer without annotating every single reference to Nyaya, which would have been pedantic.

It can be argued that the interpretation I provide in my introduction to the novel is also a form of translation. Rabi Mishra had provided an interpretation in his 1991-92 essays, as had Paul St. Pierre, who wrote about the novel from the perspective of translation theory. I wanted to show, in addition to the centrality of the narrator, what I call the “metaphorical subtext” of the novel, the allusive intertextual level that reveals, much more richly than the plot alone can, the radical subaltern values of the novel. So in a way, the work of translation can be perceived in stages, along a continuum—beginning with the choice of diction and syntax, then through explanatory footnotes, and finally through interpretive essays that revise or challenge the contemporary reader’s assumptions about what an Indian novel is, and especially what a novel about village life is supposed to be like. Translations, much like essays in interpretation, are always a critical engagement with our own times. As we readers question our assumptions and revise our views, our prejudices and resistances, translations need to be updated, since more of the relevant details can be appreciated. Complex texts like *Six Acres* teach us how to be better readers. They produce their readers, gradually, over time. And this process by which we learn to be better and more sophisticated readers is not narrowly “literary”, since it involves the broader culture – including our entrenched habits, beliefs, and ideological investments. In the case of *Six Acres*, one of our ideological investments that is unearthed and challenged is our babu-like faith in the inherent superiority of urban perspectives over rural ones, and of writing over orality.

The oral dimension of the novel is evident in the final version of the translation but the connection with the Odia folk performance form, *pala*, is something that occurred to me much later. The “touter” social type I identify in my introduction to the novel is a close cousin of the *pala gayaka* (lead singer), since both use parodic discourse, and this hunch

was confirmed when I read, via Tilottoma Mishra's translation, Hemchandra Barua's "Fair Without, Foul Within", and saw how close the connections are between the thia-pala traditions of Assam and Odisha. Tilottoma Mishra pointed out to me in conversation that since Assam and Odisha have had extensive cultural contact and interchange ever since the days of Shankar Dev in the 15th century, Assamese scholars of folk traditions think that Odishan and Assamese pala may well have influenced one another over the centuries. This is something I want to look into more closely. No one I know is working on this subject. It would also be good to look carefully at the textual echoes of pala in Barua and Senapati (and of similar folk forms in texts from other regions of India). To understand, more generally, the relationship between pala and literature in eastern India, we need a good history of pala as it has developed in different ways in Assam, Bengal (both Bangladesh and West Bengal), and Odisha. A comparative study of pala across the three linguistic regions would be illuminating. I was fascinated to discover that pala in Assam has its origins in tribal traditions of worship. I think it is quite likely that the interactive form of the performance was influenced by the multi-genre pedagogical kirtan practice popularised by Namdev in 14th-century Maharashtra.

By the way, my own approach to *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* is most probably shaped by my earliest encounters with it, which were as oral performance. My brother, who is seven years older than me, used to read out the humorous passages to me when I was in my early teens – and I remember him laughing so hard that he often almost fell off his chair. So even though Senapati's novel is a canonical text in Odisha, my first encounter with it was not an academic one, and I am grateful for that. This is certainly not a novel that should be initially approached in an overly solemn scholarly context. Consciously and unconsciously, what I have been trying to do in my later engagements with the novel over

several decades is to understand why my initial oral encounter with Senapati's text was so vivid and powerful, and to trace some of that power back to the written text and its cultural sources. I wasn't at all surprised to learn recently – and I am sure you won't be surprised either – that *Chha Mana* later became the source text for pala performances, and it has been used especially by organisations on the Left for cultural and political education in Odia villages.

Most of the textual analyses in *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature* have a comparative focus. Your introduction to the volume says that a genuinely comparative approach to Indian literature – literature produced across regions and linguistic traditions – can help us avoid the problems caused by regional insularity and cultural chauvinism. Can you say a bit more about that?

Cultural chauvinism is toxic for the student of literature. I think some forms of cultural chauvinism in India originated during British rule as a kind of mimicry, initially a defence against cultural denigration by the colonial masters. The irony is that the defence ("my culture is also great, much like those of your European nations") in fact drew on the ugliest forms of ethnocentrism and the racist logic found in 18th and 19th century Europe ("we are culturally superior to them, the barbarians, the 'mlecchas' – and the languages of our less civilised neighbours are worth less than our Sanskritised Aryan languages"). Think, in this context, about the French aristocrat Gobineau's racist theories but also about the race-based assumptions in Matthew Arnold's views about "national" literary cultures (e.g., his essays on Celtic literature). Even more relevant are the debates in 18th century England over the need to "standardise" English by classicising it. Spurious linguistic theories were closely tied to race- and class-based anthropological theories, and it is these

ideas that are marshalled by ideologues in India a century later. Intellectual historians have looked critically at these ideas (e.g., about “Englishness” or “Frenchness”) in the European context, but not enough attention had been paid to the role they played in India. At least one historian, Joya Chatterji, has argued that in some parts of India cultural chauvinism developed in the 19th and 20th centuries as communalist sentiments hardened into ideologies about identity, and so chauvinism has a basis in the class interests of the newly-rich zamindars, who were mostly upper-caste Hindus. As early as 1968, Broomfield wrote insightfully about the cultural attitudes of this parvenu class. Clearly, much more work needs to be done on this topic by progressive critics and historians.

The tragedy for readers of literature is that chauvinism as a form of mimicry produced a distorted view of literature, turning it into a crude ideological weapon – “my literary history goes back farther than yours”; “this great author from the past belongs to my linguistic tradition, not yours,” etc. This ideology is toxic even for those readers who belong to the literary traditions that are ostensibly being championed or praised. Unfortunately for everyone, versions of this kind of chauvinism have often become the default position in the study of our regional literatures since Independence. Instead of studying literature, we engage in an unsavoury ideological project – superficial idolatry of authors replaces careful analysis and interpretation of texts, and it produces a deliberately insular focus on one’s own linguistic tradition based on the assumption that literary criticism is an ongoing competition among different traditions vying for prominence. This ideology sanctions, and perhaps even requires, ignorance about other modern literary traditions in India – although, of course, it can easily coexist with knowledge of Sanskrit or European literatures. The earliest histories of regional literature and monographs on individual authors published by the Sahitya Akademi in Delhi provide ample evidence of the kind of

phenomenon I am talking about, and it will take several Ph.D. dissertations to analyse those early trends from the perspective I am suggesting here.

We don't yet have an adequate – and adequately tactful – moral language to talk about chauvinism as a cultural or ideological phenomenon, so all we do is raise an eyebrow or exchange looks when we see it manifested in public – at a conference or in publications. But brave attempts to identify it have been made by leading literary figures. See Girish Karnad's 2001 article in *The Hindu*, for instance, as well as his 2009 piece titled "Tagorolatry" in *The Book Review*. At stake here, as Karnad points out, is the question of how to define the canon of "Indian literature" as well as the responsibility of editors of literary anthologies. But there is also the more general issue of how to interpret individual works of Indian literature, since a chauvinist perspective produces distorted readings of texts and authors. Imagine trying to read Dickens with the primary goal of showing how great English culture is! Or reading Tukaram with the sole purpose of celebrating the greatness of Marathi culture, and Sarala Das, who wrote subaltern versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in the 15th century, to exemplify the glorious literary history of Odisha! Such attempts would be wrong-headed because they prevent us from seeing the rich cultural crosscurrents that shape medieval and early modern Indian culture, the culture of the Natha yogis and the itinerant bards who roamed from region to region creating a truly new moment in the subcontinent's history. To read Tukaram and Sarala Das in narrowly literary-historical terms is in effect to clip their visionary wings, to be blind to the subversive social power of their work. But our modern version of cultural chauvinism may convince students of literature that this is exactly how both writers should be read since this is how literary histories in other regions are being written.

My point in my introduction to *CML* is not that literary histories are not important but that detailed textual interpretations and, in particular, cross-regional comparative studies are more urgently needed now to combat chauvinism. It has been 60 years since Independence and we may need to take a short break from writing both national and regional literary histories to focus more directly on texts, and on comparative cultural themes. As U.R. Ananthamurthy argued in his lectures at Cornell, we need more fine-grained interpretations of works of modern Indian literature as well as analyses of cross-regional textual clusters. Some of the best essays on the idea of "Indian literature" – whether by Aijaz Ahmad, Sisir Kumar Das, Amiya Dev or K. Ayyappa Paniker – point to the need for more comparative studies as well. I especially like Paniker's idea that we need to focus on textual clusters that define socio-cultural movements across linguistic regions. (Kavita Panjabi's new edited collection, *Politics and Poetics of Sufism and Bhakti in South Asia*, may do just this kind of work. It was published in India only a few days ago and all I have seen is the table of contents, but it looks fascinating.) What Amiya Dev calls "literary history from below" – perhaps also echoing the project of the British Marxist historians – would be valuable, but first we need to get away from the insular model of literary history by producing more comparative textual analysis across linguistic traditions. A more adequate literary history will be possible once we have transcended not only the artificial opposition between high and low culture but also the huge wall conventional literary history erects between different – though related – linguistic traditions.

Let me give you an example of a situation where conventional literary history, with its primary focus on lines of direct influence within a linguistic tradition, can lead to a distorted view of cultural contact and diffusion. A few years ago, I discovered that one of the radically new themes Balaram Das's 16th century Lakshmi Purana explores concerns

the dignity of work – everyday labour, including household labour. It occurred to me that this theme echoes one of the main ideas of virasaivism, a movement that originated in 12th century Karnataka. I hadn't found direct textual evidence for this connection, and a narrow conception of literary history would have made me look for antecedents only in Odia-speaking regions (or in Sanskrit texts). But virasaivism was a popular social movement, and its influence had spread far beyond its place of origin. Travelling bards and monks spread its ideas across linguistic regions, and it would have been foolish to determine in advance that the sources of the Lakshmi Purana had to be found exclusively from within Odia-speaking cultures. Given the novelty of the theme of everyday work in that period, I suggested in writing about the Lakshmi Purana – and it was no more than a suggestion – that there may well have been a cultural connection between the virasaiva tradition of thought and the radical ideas that Balaram Das was synthesising and developing. This suggestion should of course be examined more closely, and perhaps even developed into a full-fledged thesis by a scholar familiar with both linguistic traditions. But this is one of those connections that would not have even occurred to me if I had looked for influences only within Odia literature and culture.

We need a more complex and accurate model of cultural interaction and interchange across borders, and this is in part what comparative textual studies can produce. The outlines of "Indian literature" can be discerned more clearly in these cross-border interchanges than in any grand narrative composed of different conventionally-defined literary histories. *CML*, which is a collaborative volume, is intended to contribute in a modest way to this general turn away from insularity and chauvinism and toward critical comparatism. But it is no more than a small step in this direction.

Incidentally, the rise of the discipline of Comparative Literature in Europe was itself a reaction against the blinkered vision produced by exclusively national literary studies. Hugo Meltzl, founder of the first journal of comparative literature in the 1870s, talks about the need for a journal like his to counter the cultural tendency of every nation to “consider itself ... superior to all other nations”. He calls this tendency the “national principle”, popular in 19th century literary studies in Europe. (Needless to say, healthy forms of cultural self-esteem and fellow-feeling, which include love of one’s community and one’s neighbours, do not require a belief in the superiority of one’s community over others. Jingoism or chauvinism is an unhealthy cultural development and it should be not confused with genuine pride in one’s culture and community.)

Meltzl’s anti-nationalist vision was a necessary antidote to the dominant traditions of literary studies in his time, but unfortunately the comparative focus of his discipline did not develop much beyond its Eurocentric origins, even after such inspiring 20th century movements as third-world decolonisation and socialist and feminist internationalism. There are the beginnings of a new debate about world literature among scholars in the West, however, and I feel that students of Indian literature can contribute a great deal to the vision of a genuinely decolonised and egalitarian idea of “world literature”. But that idea should emerge from detailed textual and cultural interpretations, from empirical knowledge of cultures in history, rather than from idealist speculations about Literature (with a capital L) or the kind of sweeping self-glorifying narratives we often get from purely literary histories, especially those devoted to a single tradition.

So you would agree that there is another concept vital to the chauvinist view of literature, and that involves seeing literary studies as a regulatively monolingual

practice? You implicitly oppose this monolingualism and language chauvinism by discussing the cross-regional readerships which read *Chaa Mana Atha Guntha* in Telugu, Hindi, Bangla. One could say that, for instance, the dividing line between chauvinist and anti-chauvinist approaches to Premchand's realism depends in great part on whether his works are seen in cross-regional clusters and his realist novels and short fiction are situated in several literary traditions, not only in the literary canon of adhunik Hindi. In a comparable way would you agree that the dividing line between chauvinist and anti-chauvinist approaches to *Chaa Mana Atha Guntha* rests on whether this early realist work is subsumed into pride of Odia culture movements or into a comparative and cross-regional reading practice? Is the critique of monolingual approaches to Hindi and Odia and other vernaculars the next logical step in the examination of early realist novels and of literary realism in South Asian literature?

I agree with what you say. One way out of the chauvinist model, which has become our default model in India, is to decide in advance that we have to go beyond monolingualism, not just monocultural provincialism. We have no trouble studying one Indian language with English or even French, but it would help if we could study, say, two or more Indian linguistic traditions comparatively. That is exactly what Indian scholars who advocate the idea of a "comparative Indian literature" have been suggesting for years now. Our writers have always read one another, even when they only had access to translations. But critics and scholars have not been as flexible or nimble, at least in recent decades. Most of us end up working within one linguistic tradition and then in English (and, in some cases, Sanskrit).

It is humbling to realise that bi-lingualism and cross-linguistic dialogue were reasonably common phenomena earlier in India. Let me give you one instance, out of many. I have just started working on Sarala Das's Bichitra Ramayana, which is the first mahakavya of Odia literature, composed in the early decades of the 15th century. It is a fascinating version of the Ramayana, a subaltern text of sorts, written with Sita as the narrative's centre of gravity. Now, Sachidananda Mishra, who is the foremost authority on this text, points out in his introduction that as early as the 17th century there was a Telugu translation of this text, and since then there have been four more such translations. The connections between the literary cultures of northern Andhra and southern Odisha are well known, but to discover that there were five translations into Telugu of the Bichitra Ramayana is to come to see how vibrant the bi-lingual culture was on the border of modern Andhra and Odisha, a culture that did not depend on grants from Delhi via the Sahitya Akademi! These translations were done because there was a reading community interested in such texts, a community that did not see linguistic borders as terribly significant, or at least not as an obstacle to the give and take of literary and cultural conversation. V. Narayana Rao has pointed out in several talks that the rise of English in the university curriculum during colonial rule led to a devaluation of the regional languages, with English and Sanskrit (our ancient past!) edging out the study of the modern Indian linguistic traditions. As a result, he argues, insularity and the kind of monolingualism you are identifying came to take the place of the vital cross-regional cultural exchanges that existed in precolonial times.

The point in exploring cross-linguistic literary clusters is not only to discover influences but also, as Ananthamurthy suggested in his 2000 lectures at Cornell, to explore significant similarities and differences in the use of language and of narrative mode, as well as

differences in ideological perspective. Ananthamurthy's own focus was on the contrast between Senapati's *Six Acres and a Third* and Tagore's *Gora*, and he wanted his audience to consider how different both novels are in their uses of language and dialectal registers, especially the use of "pure" vs. everyday or demotic language. That is just one example, of course, but it suggests a way of doing comparative textual analysis across regions and literary historical traditions. Close textual analysis is essential for comparative studies of this kind.

It is interesting that you refer to Matthew Arnold when you criticise the race-based view that underlies 19th century European conceptions of literary history. But the almost spiritual function Arnold ascribed to literary criticism is akin to the ethical imperative in the call you and Ananthamurthy make to perform a vigorously critical comparative reading in the making of a truly egalitarian world lit.

I have never been averse to the idea of talking about the ethical implications of the various critical approaches to literature, by the way. That isn't all there is to the study of literature, but as in other areas of life ethical considerations are involved in so many of the choices we make – about which texts to focus on, where to devote our time and energy, etc. Also, while I think Arnold's conception of national literary traditions is limited by the racial and nationalist ideas that were current in Europe in his time, I would not have too much trouble with his focus on the role literature plays in cultural pedagogy. Literature does indeed play that role, and the writings of critics – nonacademic readers, magazine reviewers, and professional scholars – can shape the discussions in productive ways. The best way to facilitate such a discussion today – going beyond Arnold's ideological blinkers

– is to democratise literary criticism as much as possible, to take it out of stuffy seminar rooms, for instance, and bring it back to coffee houses and union halls and our traditional village gathering places. For centuries, texts like Jagannath Das’s Odia Bhagavata have been read and discussed in communal spaces called “Bhagavata Tungis” in Odisha, and there are similar institutions in other regions of India. Popular performance traditions such as pala and Ramlila are similar venues where critical ideas are articulated, and it would be wonderful to imagine these critical spaces – from the Ramlila performance to the academic seminar at the University of Pittsburgh or Bombay – as somehow connected, but not in a hierarchical way. If the Bhagavata and Ramcharitmanas can be read in popular public spaces, there is no reason why *Godaan* or *Samskara* cannot be appreciated, discussed and criticised in such spaces as well. Perhaps one day we will see literary criticism occupy an important place in popular education, the kind of education for empowerment championed by people like Paulo Freire. The discussion of literature, adequately democratised, can contribute to cultural decolonisation and help develop attitudes and habits of autonomy and critical thinking.

But wouldn’t you say that there is a tension between the valorisation of genuinely syncretic political and social spaces created in the subcontinent by travelling bards in the popular/oral storytelling, performative sphere and the careful empirical knowledge that is now required to situate literary texts and read them productively.

Our medieval and early modern popular bards and wandering yogis were doing more than just telling stories and singing songs, they also developed and spread powerful ideas across the subcontinent’s various regions. This is exactly what our Sufis did as well. One

could argue that these bards and mystics were also collecting and analysing empirical information about the places they visited, exploring new ideas, testing new theories – and these would be evident in how the songs and stories were adapted to the different regions and subcultures of India. If you take a look at the way Kabir exists in the popular imagination even today, and consider how many people in villages still write – not just recite Kabir but even compose – in his radical iconoclastic metaphysical mode, you will see that criticism and literature coexist in the everyday lives of ordinary people. That is part of what Shabnam Virmani's films on Kabir showed, I think. Taking the implications of her films seriously can enable us to rescue Kabir and other writers from the confines of the academic canon and open our eyes to the vitality that often exists in popular cultural spaces.

How do we prevent the world lit you speak of from getting commoditised and flattened in world lit courses?

The term "world lit", as I use it, is a goal of critical practice, of cross-cultural conversations. It does not refer to a canon of literary works. Even Goethe, when he initially came up with the term "Weltliteratur" in the early 19th century, thought of it less as a body of literary works – fixed or growing – and more as the process by which critics and general readers learn how to live consciously and intelligently in a pluralised cultural space, a space shaped by increased travel and cross-cultural contact through translations and criticism. Remember how dazzled Goethe was by Kalidas's *Sakuntala*, which he read in translation? His famous quatrain about Kalidas is written in 1791. So naturally, Goethe invoked the virtues of cultural openness and tolerance while discussing world literature and praised the attempt made by writers and scholars "to understand one another and

compare one another's work" across national boundaries. Our universities today can contribute to the cultivation of these virtues, but I am not sure that the best way to do this is to produce the one definitive anthology of world literature that all students should read. A better way to begin is to deal with textual clusters of the kind we discussed in the context of Indian literature, and to show through comparative analysis how thinking "across cultures" is a difficult but necessary – and enormously rewarding – activity. Part of the challenge is to change our reading habits, which are shaped by the habits of the cultures in which we have grown up.

Let me suggest something very simple, but something that I think is essential. One way for academic critics to contribute to this process of changing our sedimented cultural habits is by resolving to write and speak lucidly, avoiding unnecessary jargon. This change in our customary manner of speaking and writing may make us more rigorous, in my view, since it will make our ideas more accessible to non-academic readers and we have to respond to their queries, critical comments, and even imaginative reconstructions of what we are proposing. Such a change in our language is essential especially if we are striving to create more democratic spaces for criticism where "high" and "low" discourses are not kept separate and insulated from one another. Imagine the pedagogical possibilities for a second: students in our classes could be more like performers and audience members at a *pala* or *nautanki* performance, responding to the texts from cultures not their own with humour and openness, unafraid to take risks and to make mistakes, extending the text's implications in new ways. I remember how delighted I was when one of my students in my Modern Indian Novel course at Cornell responded to the narrator of *Six Acres* by saying: "This guy is exactly like Stephen Colbert, except that he is from late-19th century India!"

A central theme of *CML* is alternative modernities and you have also explored that theme in your analysis of the Lakshmi Purana. What is the importance of alternative modernities for our current project of world literature?

The recent work on alternative modernities, which I have been reading and learning from, is part of an interdisciplinary project that originated in conferences and publications on "Multiple Modernities" and "Early Modernities". It is inspired by work done by people like the sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt and, later, by the important interventions of Sheldon Pollock and others. In postcolonial studies, of course, Dilip Gaonkar and Dipesh Chakravarty brought the theme to prominence, and Charles Taylor did valuable work as well. In India, scholars at Banaras Hindu University led by Sanjay Kumar, Archana Kumar (both from the English Department) and Raj Kumar (from Hindi) have organised major conferences on this subject over these past few years, and this year they are collaborating with scholars from China (and Indian historians of China, such as Kamal Sheel) to put together innovative seminars extending those themes. The basic idea is that the dominant form of modernity we know today, as it has been defined by the rise of capitalism in Europe, is not the only kind of modernity the world has known. In fact, part of the excitement of intellectual projects like this is to produce, through historical and cultural research, reasonably cogent pictures of a non-capitalist modernity.

I've argued in a few places that while this project is a fundamentally interdisciplinary one, the study of literature can make a special contribution to it. In periods that we traditionally call "pre-modern", literature often provides the best evidence of non-dominant layers of culture and thought, alternative values that may remain invisible if we look only at the socio-economic trends. Read through the lens of alternative modernities, literary texts

open up new historical archives and suggest tantalising perspectives on a past we thought we knew well. And of course the corpus that is traditionally considered literary will itself change – for we will include in it mahapuranas in Sanskrit and Kathakali folk performances in Malayalam, orally transmitted proverbs in Tuka's Marathi as well as vivah geet (wedding songs sung by women) in 19th century Bhojपुरi.

Can this emerging interdisciplinary focus on alternative modernities contribute to our understanding of what world literature is? I am sure it can. But a lot depends on whether more literary scholars become interested in this subject and whether we are willing to shed our disciplinary inhibitions and work between and across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. One key empirical thesis I'd urge scholars to consider is that Indian modernity does not begin with colonial rule and that its elements can be discerned much earlier, in many different strands of culture and society. If it is likely that there are various forms of modernity, the concept of modernity can be disaggregated – that is, its constituent features can be taken apart and imaginatively re-examined in new combinations in different social and cultural contexts. (I suggested this in my introduction to *CML*.) Literary and cultural critics can explore the emergence of modern ideas, values, and cultural forms through close textual analysis, especially if we remain both historically imaginative and philosophically precise. Such analysis can complement, and even inspire, related work done by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians on cultural ideologies and social institutions.

We find immensely energising your critique of cultural and moral relativism, your advocacy of a cross-cultural learning that is not the literary equivalent of making polite conversation, but is instead a vigorous engagement with difference. The

cultural interpreter is not afraid to disagree or pass judgment. This seems to be a call to return to intimacy with all its attendant messiness and conflicts. This is a position not of indifferent tolerance but of the recognition that difference is in fact the very condition of engagement.

Yes, the challenge is to go beyond what you call “indifferent tolerance”. We’ve all learned about the dangers of ethnocentrism, but relativism – which is not its opposite but merely its mirror image – does not take us too far. Its very logic produces indifference, as many critics of relativism have argued. We need to go beyond both ethnocentrism and extreme forms of cultural relativism and take the risk of making judgments, of being wrong, of revising our views by examining where and how we went wrong. This cannot be a purely theoretical project. Even though our theoretical presuppositions sometimes contribute to our skewed judgments, the solution cannot be found purely at the level of theory.

As I—and so many others—have argued, it helps in such a situation to have a belief in a non-positivist, supple, and complex notion of objectivity as an ideal of inquiry. That is what I find attractive in philosophical realism. A belief in objectivity as a revisable ideal, and in the fact that even our best current beliefs are corrigible, produces the kind of humility we need as students of culture, especially of phenomena that overlap and cross-cultural boundaries. One of the many advantages of the present moment is that the long intellectual shadow of the Age of European Empire seems to be receding a bit, and we have remarkable opportunities to work across cultures to learn from one another. We can retreat from this challenge and embrace a form of generalised scepticism – “How can we ever really understand other cultures?” “How can anyone really know anything?” But I think such questions aren’t genuine ones if they are pitched at this level of abstraction.

Sceptical questions become useful if they are grounded in clearly defined intellectual contexts, contexts where (for instance) the sources and causes of our errors can be localised a bit more, made specific enough to understand and, where possible, eliminate.

Once you consider the epistemic guidance provided by the ideal of objectivity (and the related notion of "error"), the literary-critical conception of "realism" becomes less useful for the purposes of textual interpretation. Literary realism is a vague and ambiguous term, sometimes pointing to generic conventions while at others emphasising analytical ambition and depth. Considering its use in anthologies and by the popular press, it is not likely that the term "literary realism" is going to disappear any time soon, and we will probably keep using it as a period concept. But if the distinction between descriptive and analytical realism is a helpful one, it suggests that for the purposes of textual interpretation the term "realism" will need to be used in more precise ways, with its meaning disambiguated. One advantage of the concept of analytical realism is that it does just that. It also enables literary critics to contribute to a larger project that they can share with historians, philosophers, and social scientists – a project that takes as its object social reality and the many textual ways it is both mediated and interpreted. Analytical realism points to more than the accretion of mimetic details. It encourages us as readers, and as professional critics, to look at the epistemic work that is done by literary and cultural forms, styles, modes, and conventions. What underlies the concept is a "cognitivist" view of literature and culture, a view that is sharply at odds with the kind of overly general – and often *a priori* and decontextualised – scepticism that is popular in some literary-critical circles.

I suppose it won't come as a surprise to you that I think of "world literature" as a realist and cognitivist project – much more than just a canon of important texts. It implies, as

Goethe suggested, a sustained epistemic engagement with other literatures and cultures, and part of what we achieve through such engagement is a greater awareness of our own cultural and historical situatedness. Translations make such a project possible, but it is more fundamentally a hermeneutical process: it involves the kind of focused cross-regional and cross-national comparative interpretation we discussed earlier in the context of Indian literature. In my view, work on "world literature" will have to be necessarily interdisciplinary, and it will draw on a very flexible conception of what literature is. The non-relativist cross-cultural project implied by the idea of "world literature" – of unlearning deeply ingrained prejudices and learning new ways of thinking – will end up taking us out of the spaces traditionally reserved for literature. I've placed "world literature" within quotes to indicate that it is a bit like any good slogan, useful to refer to the future that we want but haven't yet fully imagined. That future is shaped by our social and political ideals, not just literary ones. And good slogans – like "Another World Is Possible!" or "We Are the 99%" – help by providing a general sense of direction.

Recommended Reading

Works by Satya P. Mohanty (pertinent to the interview)

Satya P. Mohanty. *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India*; New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. South Asia Edition: New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011.

See in particular, Mohanty's introduction to this anthology for a sophisticated analysis of Senapati's novel which in itself functions as a model of the careful cross culturalist reading he passionately advocates in "translating" and teaching texts in a world literature

framework. The references to Ulka Anjaria, Paul Sawyer, Tilottoma Mishra and Hemichandra Barua's work are to essays included in this anthology. The following is the content list of essays for your convenience:

- Two Classic Tales of Village India: Investigating the Realist Epistemology in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* and *Godaan*; H.S. Mohapatra

- Girls for Sale and Six Acres: The Shared World of Gurajada Apparao and Fakir Mohan Senapati; V.N. Rao

- The Emergence of the Modern Subject in Oriya and Assamese Literatures: Fakir Mohan Senapati and Hemchandra Barua; T.Misra

- 'Why Don't You Speak?': The Narrative Politics of Silence in Three South Asian Novels; U. Anjaria

- PART II: THE MANY CONTEXTS OF SIX ACRES AND A THIRD Gender and the Representation of Women in Six Acres and a Third; C. Horan

- Rediscovering Ramachandra Mangaraj. *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*: A Critique of Colonial Rule; G.N. Dash

- Tradition-Modernity Dialectic in Six Acres and a Third; D.K. Dash & D.R. Pattanaik

- Appendix: Hemchandra Barua's Classic Text *Bahire Rongsong Bhitare Kowabhatari* (Fair Outside and Foul Within) - Translated from the Assamese by Tilottoma Misra.

— Six Acres and a Third The classic novel about colonial India by Fakir Mohan Senapati.

Co-translated Oriya novel (originally published in Orissa in 1897-99); Introduction by

Satya P. Mohanty. U California Press (2005) and Penguin-India (2006). Co-translators: Paul St. Pierre (Canada), Jatin Nayak (India), and Rabi S. Mishra (India)

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