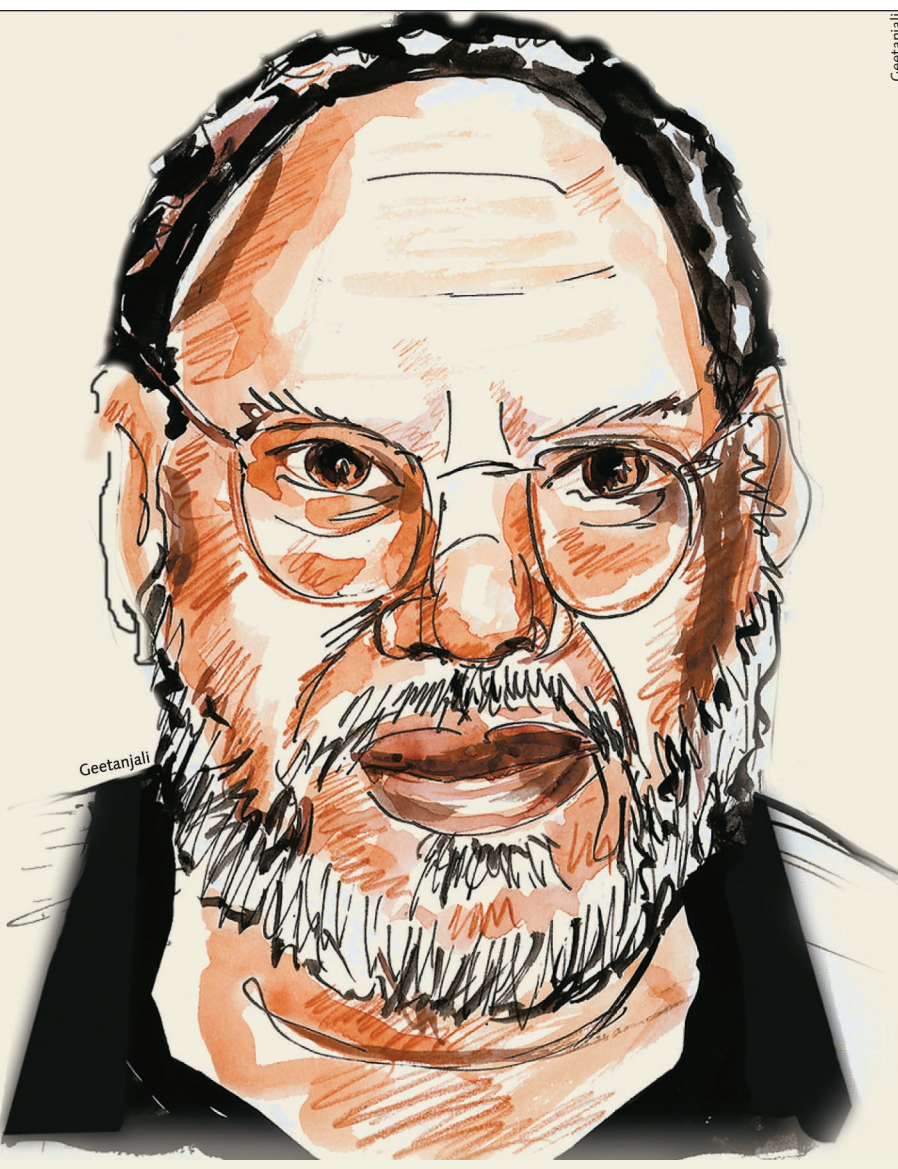


Ashis' use of culture as a weapon has been achieved by restricting its meaning to the triad of resource, lifestyle, resistance.



Ashis Nandy

Blazing ideas, but no stars

If you cannot find words for your violation, then have you been violated? If you cannot voice your anguish, then can anyone hear it? If you have been a participant in your own destruction then of whom will you ask vengeance? If the gods you worship, science or its successor, destroy the ones you love then to whom will you turn?

Bonfire of Creeds, by Ashis Nandy, a collection of 17 seriously heavy essays 'seeks to create a language for the oppressed'. It is a battle against principles (science, development, secularism, the nation-state, revivalist traditions), which while they claim to be in the benefit of man, anaesthetise us to the blood sacrifice they demand. 'Collateral damage', 'sacrifices for development' have helped perpetuate genocides by forming blinkers that prevent us from reacting to the full horror.

In opposition to the dark empire, Ashis Nandy raises up the entity of culture. He uses its

Bonfire of Creeds - The Essential Ashis Nandy
Ashis Nandy
Bangalore: Oxford University Press
pp 488, Rs 595

viewpoint to portray the brutalisation inflicted by several seemingly comic book heroic principles.

From this viewpoint, big dam development, that has displaced four times more people than the partition, can't really hide behind the fig leaf of national interest.

From this viewpoint, secularism, a religion that 'divinises man's critical rationality' is revealed as that which suffocates all other religions.

From this viewpoint, he argues Hindutva is antithetical to Hinduism. For the self appointed defender of the faith half-despises the faith he defends as ef-

feminate, emasculating. From this viewpoint, science that amputates reason from feeling can't really claim to be man's protector.

The dance of iconoclastic flames is fascinating. And provokes discussion. Among policy-makers and grassroots activists, the books avowed target, the perspectives were seen as interesting. But it really was to the lay person, executives, managers, the DTP operator, peon, servant, that the ideas seemed liberating.

Now the Bonfire is a place to burn tattered old creeds. But when the ashes have died down one has to ask what will come in its place.

If Newtonian science's portrayal of man as an inefficient irrational being that needs to be controlled will turn us into cyborgs, *The Bonfire of Creeds'* view of man, brutalised and hence populated by demons, which need to be exorcised with political correctness is equally unappealing.

The argument of 'Restructuring Childhood' - adults are too brutalised to bring up children - is exactly the one used by authoritarianism to tear open the family to interventionism. Smothering patriarchy is not necessarily a better thing than rabid patriarchy.

Ashis' use of culture as a weapon has been achieved by deliberately restricting its meaning to the triad of resource, lifestyle, resistance. In 'Restructuring Childhood', Ashis refers to the Spartan example of upbringing.

To many this points to the most primal definition of culture - which tempers the adult and gives a tribe its spine. While this definition has been misused by extreme rightwingers, it has been used by Robert Bly to re-enfranchise masculinity and by the modern corporation to strengthen its effectiveness, purpose and integrity.

If Hindutva can be indicted

for not understanding the religion it seeks to defend, the *Bonfire* by that measure doesn't demonstrate closeness with the oppressed it gives voice to. Numerous analyses of thought-leaders dot the essays. Not one on the oppressed.

From the tower of his brilliant intellect Ashis can see all the flaws. But no stars. Childhood is just the glamour we give to mask the pain. Adults just brutalised children. Rationality the mark of our slavery.

The dilemma that the intellectual fighter for the oppressed faces is that he disbelieves all hope as the deceit of the devil. And yet without hope can become a Denethor transfixed by techno-Sauron's power.

After the Czar will come a Lenin, unless we stop just trying to cut off the Ogre's head and start trying to find his heart and ours.

TARUN CHERIAN

Complexities of Indian life chronicled by a foreigner

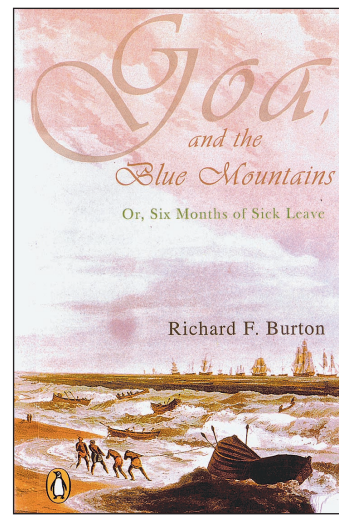
Burton's brief sojourn in India initiated him into the life of a nomadic genius.

Richard F Burton was a complex personality who represented the Victorian morality and defied the same as well. He came to India in 1842 to join the Bombay Army. He spent eight years in India and learnt a host of languages and dialects.

Burton, the polyglot, is considered to be a prominent scholar and explorer of the Orient whose interests were not merely limited to the languages and geography as typical of the writings of his times but instead covered an exhaustive analysis of race, customs and insights into the psyche of the natives with an objective detachment. This unique talent sets him apart from other Western travelers and writers on India.

After an attack of cholera, Burton took two years of sick leave and spent the first six months in the South Western coast. He took a long and tedious journey from Bombay in a patimar (a small boat), visiting Goa, Calicut and Malabar on the way to Ooty in the Nilgiri, a popular hill station for British officers. Burton wrote about his journey and experiences in his first book, *Goa and the Blue Mountains* published in 1851. He stayed in Goa and visited places like new and old Goa, Panjim, Saroda and Margao. He has chronicled in detail the life and culture in Goa, with all its heterogeneity and complexity.

Burton advocates for subjugation



Goa and the Blue Mountains, or, Six Months of Sick Leave
Richard F Burton
New Delhi: Penguin, 2003
pp 240, Rs 250

tion of the ruled by violence as the only viable mechanism for sustaining and expanding the empire. Like an ethnographer, Burton depicts the caste structure of the Hindu, the lifestyle of the Christians, the education system and the military structure of Goa. From Goa, Burton sails to Calicut and Malabar.

His attention shifts to the history of the local kings, land revenue system, caste structure, laws of inheritance etc. He is riveted by the social customs of Namboodiris and Nairs. Finally, he reaches Ooty and describes in detail the salubrious valley and the monotonous lifestyles of the invalid British officers. In the

last chapter, Burton describes the wild life and the Toda tribe, the original inhabitants of the Nilgiri.

Burton's brief sojourn in India initiated him into the life of a nomadic genius and *Goa and the Blue Mountains*, being his first book, launched his literary career. He wrote two other books on Sindh and translated *Kamasutra* and *Ananga Raga*, the ancient literary-erotic treatises. Later he translated *Arabian Nights* and also went to Africa to discover the source of the Nile. An accurate biographical assessment of his life is difficult because after his death in 1890, his wife burnt most of his manuscripts and diaries.

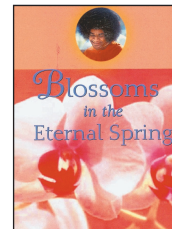
Burton occupies a unique but a controversial position due his cultural ambivalence. His subjects are source of potential threat to the empire that he represented and also became immense source of knowledge to inspire him. Edward Said says in *Orientalism* that Burton was caught between two antagonistic roles: a rebel against authority and an agent of authority. Burton's sense of racial superiority to the extent of misanthropy is a reflection of the predominant colonial discourse and this attitude is manifested in *Goa and the Blue Mountains* as well, especially when he describes Goa.

The scholarly introduction by Prof Dane Kennedy is illuminating. After all, this is not another coffee-table book on the Raj. It is a debut albeit an immature scholarly piece of work. This book needs an appreciation within the broader context of the empire and its diverse representations.

SUJIT CHOWDHURY

A book for believers and followers of the Godman

The author, who seems to be infatuated with her Lord Sai Baba, fills the book with her esoteric experiences



Blossoms in the Eternal Spring; Shammii Paranjape;
New Delhi: Rupa, 2004; pp 263, Rs 195

Has anybody seen or heard of a tamarind tree giving any fruit other than tamarind? A young boy known as Satya (Later renowned Satya Sai Baba) plucked and distributed any fruit like orange, mango or apple that his friends asked for from a tamarind tree in his village. The book *Blossoms in the Eternal Spring* authored by Shammii Paranjape is replete with this and many instances of such miracles performed by Satya Sai Baba.

The writer is infatuated with her Lord, Sai Baba and recounts in her book her various esoteric experiences. She gets messages from the Lord (another name for Baba) in her dreams, which prove correct in the waking state.

Sunil Gavaskar (writer's brother-in-law - her sister Pammy's husband), the legendary cricketer, tore badly his thigh muscle during his Australian

tour in 1977, just a week prior to a test match. He was in terrible pain and was not naturally selected to play the match. His wife sent Baba's *vibhuti* through somebody to apply it onto the affected part, which he did. The pain disappeared. Sunil played in the match and went on to score a century. It is another matter that the *vibhuti* therapy did not help in saving the life of her father and her husband.

It is known to all that Sai Baba materialises tiny objects like rings, necklaces, wrist watches. He also pops out from his mouth Shiva lingams on Shivaratri days. The writer has narrated in several pages of her book the miracles performed by Sai Baba. Rationalists like Dr (late) Kavoor of Sri Lanka and Dr H Narasimhaiah have debunked such acts and challenged the Baba to do such miracles under transparent conditions. It appears that the latter once

threw a challenge to Sai Baba to materialise an object of the size of a pumpkin. The challenge seems to have not been accepted.

Having a supportive husband like Subodh, the writer makes umpteen trips to Puttaparthi, the abode of Sathya Sai Baba. The detailed account of her travels to Puttaparthi, her attempts to get a vantage point to see and be seen by the Swami (another name by which she calls Baba) given in page after page makes it a monotonous reading.

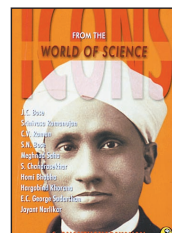
The general impression that one gets is that the writer is an infatuated lady who perceives Godhead in Satya Sai Baba. It would have been better had the writer devoted some pages about the humanitarian work that Sai Baba has been doing. He has built a high tech super specialty hospital at Puttaparthi and also a water supply project. It would have also been proper had she devoted a chapter about the teachings of Sai Baba. It would have helped the cause of spirituality.

Lucidly written the book will adorn the personal libraries of believers and faithful followers of Sai Baba. Non-believers will be left confused.

R G SUBRAMANYAM

Simplified science for the common man

The two books attempt to bring science closer to the layman by simplifying scientific concepts.



Icons from the World of Science; S Ananthanarayanan;
Puffin Books; pp 138, Rs 175

from the World of Science.

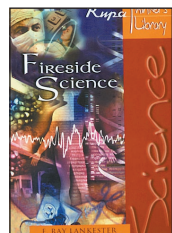
A book that briefly describes the life and works of ten great scientists of the world, it includes features on J C Bose, mathematician S Ramanujam, C V Raman, Meghnad Saha, S Chandrasekhar, S N Bose, Homi Bhabha, Hargobind Khorana, E C George Sudarshan and Jayant Narlikar.

Written in a simple language the book makes for an easy and breezy reading. The facts that

have been included make the reader feel proud that so many great science minds belonged to India. The illustrations add to the familiarisation attempt of the author and the book in toto makes for a good read.

On the 'simplifying science' end is yet another book *Fireside Science*. Probably the idea behind writing the book must have been to make science so easy that one can read and understand its concepts while relaxing by the fireside. How far it serves the purpose is really a big question.

The author has described in great detail everything from the protoplasm and Darwin's theory of evolution to the elephant, whale, sleep and laughter. Almost all descriptions are supported by suitable illustrations



Fireside Science; E Ray Lankester;
New Delhi: Rupa pp 160, Rs 150

wherever possible and an additional index at the end.

But what makes parts of the book tough on the reader is that the author has chosen to write very long sentences. Check this sample as it appears on page 13: "When we say that life and its most tremendous outcome - the mind of man - are to be studied and their gradual development traced as part of the orderly unfolding of natural processes, we

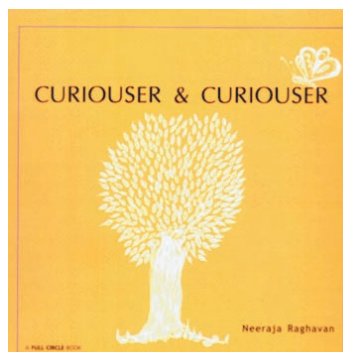
are no whit less reverent, in no degree less impressed by the immensity and mystery of the universe, than those who, with happy and obstinate adherence to primitive conceptions, think that they can explain things by calling up vital essences and wandering spirits." One would not think that the summary of the sentence above could really be understood by the fireside.

Besides, the inclusion of page numbers 135 after page 144 and the repetition of page 145 and 146 causes a great deal of discontinuity in reading. Those who don't mind the small errata and can read real paragraph sized sentences by the fireside, go for it, the book is for you.

SUBBALAKSHMI B M

BROWSER'S NOOK

Coming home to the ultimate truth



Curiouser and Curiouser
Neeraja Raghavan
New Delhi: Full Circle, 2003
pp 78, Rs 295

Curiouser and Curiouser, indeed, is a curious title for a book. Neeraja Raghavan, the author, says in the book she has tried to unite that which is within reason to that which is beyond reason, and she does it so well!

Through the journey of a butterfly in its quest to know "What stays constant? What changes?", the author, an alumnus of IIT Kanpur who is currently pursuing her passion for teaching chil-

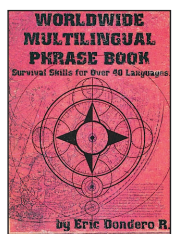
dren, helps us see simple but profound truths of creation in a new light. The author's way of explaining in simple terms how everything in the universe is interconnected, endears her to the reader's heart.

The butterfly in *Curiouser and Curiouser* was eager to learn if the river kept losing and gaining water, how could it still be the same river?, who goes away when something dies?, why the sun which was supposed to help us see everything better, was not allowing us to see the stars by day?, and beyond.

The river, mighty oak tree, the sun, the firefly, the dewdrop, the rosebud... impart the butterfly with the knowledge that leads it to the ultimate truth that we are all inter-linked to every part of the Cosmos. And from the knowledge so gained, the butterfly succeeds in putting the pieces of the puzzle together to discover that the whole universe bustles with the energy that comes from a constant source.

And now to the basic question raised by the butterfly: What stays constant? What changes?, well, read it in the book. And I promise you it will be a read worth cherishing.

SUSHMA MOHAN



Worldwide Multilingual Phrase Book; Eric Dondero
Rittberg; Portside Language Service; pp 248, \$12.50

40 languages in your pocket

When one is off to a new country, especially to a place like Germany, Japan or France, there is a tendency to panic thinking about how to overcome the language barrier.

Relax, with new and innovative *Worldwide Multilingual Phrase Book* (WMPB) by Eric Dondero Rittberg learning the basic phrases of 40 languages is easy.

The 248-page volume printed in an easy-to-carry pocket-book format is packed with commonly used phrases in over 40 different languages.

The languages covered in the book vary from the commonly heard German and French to exotic jaw-breakers like Swahili, Cantonese and Gaelic. In this

book, the best-selling, US-based linguist-cum-interpreter and a certified language instructor, Dondero offers valuable tips on how to master the basics of a foreign language easily. The book also has a chapter on web sites and tips for further language learning.

The book is well organised by language groups, the essential phrases are presented at a survival level, adequate to help in nearly any situation in a foreign land. A note on grammar, followed by a set of basic phrases, key propositions, numbers, general, extra and special vocabulary is also given.

Though the book addresses Americans and their need to learn diverse languages, it is equally useful to Indian entrepreneurs and employees traveling abroad.

"The purpose of this phrase book is to teach individuals the basics of essential words and phrases for a variety of different languages from around the world," says Dondero.

In short WMPB is an excellent resource for every traveler going abroad. Au revoir!

SRINIDHI RAGHAVENDRA L V

BOOK RACK

Anthropology

Birth on the Threshold : Childbirth and Modernity in South India; Cecilia Van Hollen (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2003, pp 279, Rs 350).

Even childbirth is affected by globalisation. The author uses the birth stories of the women of Tamil Nadu to explore larger questions about how the structures of colonialism and post-colonial development have helped to shape the form and meaning of birth for Indian women today.

Cookery

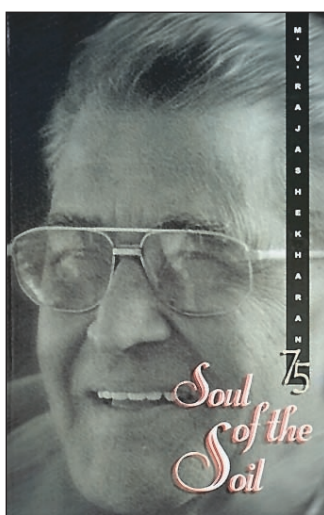
Cooking with Yogurt: Recipes for Slimmers and Microwave Users; Bapsi Nariman (New Delhi: Rupa, 2003, pp 100, Rs 295).

The book provides a new range of recipes with yogurt — recipes that please the palate as well as help to keep the body fit as most of them are low in cholesterol.

Communication

International Communication: A Global Reader; Edited by Fred E Jandt (California: Sage, 2004, pp 445, \$52.95).

This volume contains 36 articles showcasing the development and diversity of intercultural communication theories in countries such as China,



Africa, the United States, New Zealand, Mexico, Egypt and others. Themes and topics discussed include identity and communication, intercultural verbal and nonverbal processes and interactions, relationships and ethics.

Personality

Soul of the Soil: M V Rajashekharan - 75 Felicitation Volume; Edited by K R Kamalesh (Bangalore: M V Rajashekharan - 75 Felicitation Committee, 2003, pp 218, Rs 200).

Many dignitaries, friends and admirers of M V Rajashekharan from inside the country and

abroad have contributed articles to this volume.

International Relations

A Clash of Political Cultures: Sino-Indian Relations (1957-62); Sudarshan Bhutani (New Delhi: The Lotus Collection, 2004, pp 278, Rs 450) In this book, Sudarshan Bhutani critically narrates the political and diplomatic circumstances which led to the Indo-China war in 1962. He also analyses the role of the factors influencing China's domestic and foreign policies.

Sociology

Urbanisation in India: Sociological Contributions; Edited by Ranvinder Singh Sandhu (New Delhi: Sage, 2003, pp 251, Rs 330) Focusing on the complex and increasingly important socio-economic processes of urbanisation, this volume offers significant hypotheses for further exploration, while highlighting the emerging problems.

Others

Livelihood & Gender: Equity in Community Resource Management; Edited by Sumi Krishna (New Delhi: Sage, 2004, pp 439, Rs 680) This volume combines unique livelihood interventions, rigorous field-based research, analyses and activism across rural South Asia.

BESTSELLERS

Fiction

The Last Juror; John Grisham (Arrow, Rs 244)
Persuader; Lee Child (Bantam, Rs 253)
A Memory of Demons; David Ambrose (Pocket, Rs 215)
The Devil's Banker; Christopher Reich (Headline, Rs 265)
Dating Game; Danielle Steel (Corgi, Rs 289)
The Brain Fever Bird; I Allan Sealy (Picador, Rs 225)

Non-Fiction

The Splintered Mind; Dr Vijay Nagaswami (Penguin India, Rs 295)
Goa and the Blue Mountain; Richard Burton (Penguin India, Rs 250)
Journey Through Babudom and Netaland; T S R Subramanian (Rupa, Rs 395)
Eats, Shoots and Leaves; Lynne Truss (Viva Books, Rs 195)
Written in Blood; Beverley Macdonald (Viva Books, Rs 195)

COURTESY

Nagarsi Book House