

## Book Reviews

Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth : Belief and responsibility in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 260 (ISBN 0521 572606).

Myth (*Mythos*) is no more a homogeneous area of experience. Extensive researches in this area done by a host of scholars belonging to different disciplines of knowledge such as literature, philosophy, linguistics, religion and anthropology have sufficiently proved its richness and heterogeneity; and the use of different mythical modes in the poetry and narratives of the modernist culture have sufficiently demonstrated its aesthetic dimensions as well as its significance in the modernist world views. But the present author does not deal with myth as a traditional content or a means of literary organisation, but with "mythopoeia" or mythmaking which is an underlying outlook that creates myth. This mythopoeia has a double role in the modernist culture : it is not merely a foundational world view as such, it is also a living experience for him, as Thomas Mann says, " Although in the life of human race the mythic is indeed an early and primitive stage, in the life of the individual it is a late and mature one". The relationship between ancient and modern that Mann suggests as the present author understands, implies a paradox of myth in relation to modernity, i.e. set against the backdrop of romantic aestheticism; fascist ideology is partly derived from the misuses of myth. But the author says this rejection of myth by Mann sets myth against myth "accepting that the sinister appeal of regressive political mythologies is to be overcome by a recognition of the mythopoeic basis of his own humanism" (p.2).

The author further understands that in the modernist tradition myth is not merely a form of mystification or an illusory search for origins. The inherent flexibility of the concept covers a wide-ranging area of semantics such as the liberal and deconstructive ironies of Mann and Joyce, Pound's totalised fascist vision of society and in between these two ends fall Yeats, Eliot and Lawrence. The modernist decades have assigned an important truth value to literature which in its mythopoeic model refers both to belief and falsehood rather elusively. In recent vocabulary, myth is supplanted by ideology. The author admits that his approach to mythopoeia in the modernist tradition is complementary to the approaches of MacIntyre and Rorty in the sense that while the former deals with the normal aspect of the issue and the latter misses the appreciation of conviction, he combines radical relativism with the apodictic nature of conviction, thus making the question of conviction and relativism central to his present study. In the three different sections of the book the modernist mythopoeia is treated in its German postromantic phase proceeding gradually through the early twentieth century poets and novelists such as Yeats, Joyce and Lawrence followed by Pound and Eliot with Conrad and Mann leading into the second half of the century, reaching finally the narrative fictions of Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Thomas Pynchon and Angela Carter.

The most original part of the study seems to be Professor Bell's observations on the way the modernist mythopoeia (or myth) is supplanted by the concept of "ideology" denoting a worldwide view that radically demystifies the modernist mythopoeic consciousness. He traces three historical phases in the growth of ideological consciousness - from the nineteenth century to the recent times, i.e. from Marx to the neo-Marxists like Jameson and Said through Orwell and Raymond Williams. In his evaluation of the process of this shift, Bell rightly observes that if myth deserved its defamation in the literary and political usages, the ideological critique too suffered the same kind of reduction. All works that can be characterised as art are not of equal significance. Therefore the value and commitment involved in the notion of artistic greatness cannot be assessed only by the process of demystification of artistic consciousness. In fact, the modernist sensibility did not mystify each and every value, it mystified the aesthetic values only which are of unique or extraordinary character. This uniqueness of some of the cultural values is to be recognised by the propounders of the ideological critique, even if they believe that "culture is ordinary". This recognition, a powerful phenomenon in the modernist sensibility, is remarkably suppressed by both Jameson and Said.

B.C. Dash.

*Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, Vol. XX : Nos. 1-2 : 1997

David Quint, *Epic and Empire : Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. x +433.

In *Epic and Empire* David Quint presents a critique of the political ideology of epic, the most important genre of narrative since the classical period. He concentrates on the epic poetry, beginning with Virgil and Continuing through Camoses, Tasso, Lucan, Ercilla upto Milton. In the last chapter he takes up for discussion Sergei Eisentein's epic film *Alexander Nevsky*.

Dividing the bok into two principal sections Quint explores the ideological meaning of epic in terms of two major political traditions : one that celebrates conquests and legitimizes a concentrated imperial power structure, and the other that upholds republican liberty in a decentralized system of power. Accordingly, the epics of conquest, namely Virgil's *Aenied*, Camose's *Lusiads*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberta*, fall within the first tradition, while Lucan's *Phassalia*, Ercilla's *Araucana* and d' Aubingne's *Less Tragiques*, being the epics of the vanquished, belong to the second tradition. Quint argues convincingly that these traditions produced opposing ideals of historical narrative : a linear teleological narrative that belongs to the imperial conquerors and an episodic, open - ended narrative that gravitate towards 'romance' and becomes a story told of and by the defeated.

*Aenied* in Quint's discussion appears as a grand poetic scheme of imperialist ideology and sets the epic tradition of conquest and empire. The mnarrative progression that shows Aneas and Trojans transformed from losers at Troy to victors in Italy has a topical relevance to the political situation of Virgil's Rome, a nation in the Augustan period. The epics of the victors do contain the narratives of the curses, these narratives acknowledge the presence of opposing voices, dissenting perspectives and alternative histories to be placed alongside the official, triumphalist narrative of the victor that the epic privileges.

The episodic dismemberment of narrative finds full expression in *Pharsalia* and sets the tradition of the loser's epic. Its loose formal organization, being a distinctive feature of the loser's epic, manifests itself in the inconclusive endings and romance digressions of *Araucana* and the spatially ordered tableaux of *Less Tragiques*. The loose formal structure argues for a less centralized political arrangement running counter to Virgilian ideology of centralized power.

In the second section of the book Quint repeats the alternation between the above two traditions by focusing on the works of Tasso and Milton. While Tasso's *Jerusalemme liberata* affirms the cause of a triumphalist Counter - Reformation papacy much in Virgilian imperialist terms, Milton's *Paradise Lost* seems to uphold the autonomy of individual belief and contingency of free human desire in opposition to the ideology of absolutist modern state. Hence, the experience of Adam and Eve gets assimilated into the mode of romance and *Paradis Lost* conforms to the general movement of the seventeenth century in the direction of romance.

Even as writing of epic declined after Milton, these obtained a scope for the revival of medieval heroic poetry and recovery of "lost" national traditions of epic poems through the model of Macpherson's Ossian poems. Expanding their colonial frontiers, the bourgeois European nations celebrated their stories of doomed aristocratic heroism narrated through epic. Sergei Eisentein's communist film, *Alexander Nevsky*, is perhaps the last important product of the revival of heroic middle ages, says Quint.

*Epic and Empire* is a brilliant exercise in linking the epic text with its historical occasion through the investigation of textual allusions, both topical and poetic. By showing the links of the epic text to both political situation and poetic tradition of epic, this book makes a point of departure from poststructuralist critical practice, which treats literature only as cultural practice embedded in other practices in a widely conceived web of intertextual relationships. Quint chooses to remain respectful towards the humanist notions about epic text being the formalization of weighty and conservative genre. He thus awards due importance to generic conventions and formal features of the epics as part of a literary tradition while discussing the ideological meaning of individual texts.

In Quint's scheme of argument, the term "ideology" is highly elastic in its function. Its function moves between individual epic text and contiuous epic tradition. It means to him/ Jameson's sense / imaginary or "formal" solutions to "unresolvable social contradictions". It not merely produces a master narrative to subsume any historically contingent situation but also, more specifically, it assimilates

into epic's inherited formal and narrative structures a whole series of cultural and psychic associations accounting for the imaginative appeal of a given passage in a text.

Quint's book bears the impress of scholarly seriousness, which is leavened by a highly lucid and engaging style.

Ashok K. Mohapatra

Pathak, R.S. *Indian Response to Literary Theories*, Vol. II, New Delhi : Creative Books , 1996, pp. viii + 251.

Patnaik, P., *Rasa in Aesthetics : An Application of Rasa Theory to Modern Western Literature*, New Delhi, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1997, pp. xvi+281.

The most important development in the academic study of literature in the West during the last forty years is the phenomenal growth of literary theories. This development was obviously a reaction against the supposed theoretical practice of criticism that entrenched itself in the university departments of literature under the influence of New Criticism. The climate of theoretical speculation in the West inspired in India revival and reinterpretation of Sanskrit and classical Tamil literary theories. It also led to an upsurge of comparative studies of Indian theories and their Western analogues as well as application of Indian theories in the analysis of Western literary texts. The two books under review represent these concerns of the Indian academics today.

The standards of scholarship and critical analysis as evidenced by the books are uneven and the responses enshrined therein do not bear out any characteristic Indianness in terms of attitude and methodology. This is the sad fact of contemporary Indian criticism and scholarship that even after many years of academic study of literature, it has not been possible to develop a distinctively Indian critical and scholarly practice. While contemporary Indian creative literature can flaunt its Indianness, works of criticism and literary scholarship remain mostly parasitic on Western models.

Professor Pathak's anthology consists of two sections, each containing nine essays, the first one dealing with interactions of Western and Indian theories and the second with applications of different theories for studying individual texts. Krishna Rayan studies the role of *Vibhavas* or objects in aesthetic experience examining the poetics of *Tolkappiyam*, Eliot's theory of 'objective correlative' and Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay, "The Affective Fallacy". Following the latter, he suggests that the term "objects" is to be defined inclusively to embrace plot, character and language of the text and as the suggesters of emotion, the objects are to be the principal concern for a marriage between New critical practice and *Rasa* theory. He, however, ignores the radical questioning of the New Critical dogma by the later theorists.

If Prof. Rayan is a neo-Newcritic , Prof. P.S. Sastri, the only other old guard among the Indian academics represented in the anthology, is a new-Neo - Aristotelian. His essay, "Plot and *Rasa* in a Lyric", is a detailed examination in the Chicago School manner of Elder Olson's view of the lyric with references to Aristotle, Bharata and Abhinavagupta and analyses several American and British critics. For Sastri, plot is "The imitation of an activity" and in the lyric, the activity is that of "the inner life of man". "The Indian analogue to Aristotle's concept of plot appears to, be *rasa*". This assumption is an unexamined one and the analogy is not worked out in the essay, despite its being the longest in the anthology running to thirty two pages.

In "Dynamics of the Reader -Response", the editor examines the role of the reader in aesthetic experience in several Western theories and observes that the Western theories in general, emphasize the cognitive rather than the affective aspect of reading experience. On the other hand, the Indian view of *sahrdaya* and his experience turns out to be more comprehensive and systematic and, therefore, can provide a better basis for the formulation of the laws of literary experience. Curiously enough, while advancing his thesis, the author completely ignores the problematic of his position. The concepts of the Reader - Response theories oppose the ideal reader, the *sahrdaya*, willing to escape from his ego, identify with the work and immerse himself completely in the experience embodied in the literary work. How can the concept of *sahrdaya* - albeit an obsolete one for these later day theories - satisfy the Deconstructionists, the Feminists and the New Historicists ?

Other contributors to the section on "Interactions", however, restrict themselves to patient and careful comparisons of details rather than rusting to advance large claims. Prof. Kushwaha studies the dramatic theories of Bharata and Aristotle and notes the similarities and differences between those meticulously. Bharata is again pitted against Stanislavsky by points as regards creativity and aesthetic experience. A.K. Singh examines *Vakrokti* and Russian Formalism and observes similarities in respect of defamiliarisation device and the like while noting the difference of approach to the creative activity and creator in the two systems.

A.C. Sukla's study of the sister arts theory, particularly *ut pictura poesis* in India and the West, is a model of comparative criticism. Sukla makes a detailed survey of the genesis, growth and decay of the theory in the West with a coda on its recent revival. He interposes a discussion on the development and eventual rejection of the theory in India investigating in the process the ontology of art, reality and representation to justify this rejection. Sukla's comprehensiveness is marked in another paper of this section in "Theory of the Novel : The Indian view" by Kapil Kapoor. It is a fine study of the theory of narrative fiction in India detailing the various sub-genres and the constitutive elements. Kapoor's contribution does not fit to the particular comparative scheme of this section of the book and so does Rai's perceptive study of Brecht's influence on contemporary Indian dramatists.

The section on "Applications" is still more an assortment of papers without any definite perspective such that one feels that those are there to fill in certain number of pages of the volume. Papers on Linguistic and New Historicist approaches in the study of literature survey the gains and losses accrued from such approaches. Prof. Mohan Thampi details the principles of western rhetoric and Indian *alamkara* and recommends a mode of practical criticism on those principles, but his demonstration - an analysis of Arnold's "Dover Beach" - fails to carry conviction about the efficacy of his scheme. However, R.S. Sharma's application of *Rasa* theory to the study of the Burial of the Dead" section of "The Waste Land" is a very perceptive and rewarding attempt. One would like to see more of Indian academics trend on Sharma path and help develop a truly Indian response to literature.

Some of the papers of the sections are rather old-fashioned, as for example, structural analysis of D.H. Lawrence's "St. Mawr" and the archetypal analysis of *Serpent and the Rope*. Three very interesting papers adopt the sociological approach. D.S. Mishra gives a complete review of the principles of Bakhtin's dialogics and applies the same to an analysis of *The River Sutra*. Dharamidhar Sahu presents a fine study of Shakespeare's Thersites by using Bakhtin's idea of carnival. Sudhir Kumar's study on the construction of a nation in some novels by Muslim authors seeks to establish the politics of writing and its reception. Despite the limitations, the anthology will serve its purpose of arousing interest in literary theorists for which Prof. Pathak is to be congratulated.

Dr. Priyadarshi Patnaik's book is a laudable attempt at expounding the principles of *Rasa* theory in an exhaustive manner and applying the same in the analysis of some modern Western literary texts. What attracted Patnaik to the study of *Rasa* theory is, as he says, its fundamental insight that emotions are basic to all literature and concern with the variety of emotions, their constituents and models of presentation in literary works. The author asserts that in the present day academic world where theories vie with one another in being more technical and riddled with intricate dialects, the *rasa* theory has a simplicity and directness of approach that makes it more relevant for study and enjoyment of literature. Patnaik divides his book into ten chapters apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion. Two of the chapters are devoted to the exposition of *rasa* and its varieties in general followed by one chapter for each of the nine *rasas* while combining the *bhayanaka* and *bibhatsa* into one chapter.

In his discussion of *rasa* in general and the different *rasas* in particular, Patnaik draws on the *Natyasastra* and translations and hardly uses the insights of other theorists. No reason is adduced for this limitation imposed on the work attempted here. The texts subjected to *rasa* analysis are varied enough comprising those by Kafka, Mayakovsky, Eliot, Lorca, Hemingway, Hesse, Camcus, Neruda, Beckett, Ionesco and a host of others spanning the three main literary genres of poetry, drama and fiction. The texts come from a variety of cultures : British, American, Latin American, European, Chinese, Japanese and like. The aim of establishing the universality of *rasa* and its applicability in

criticism has been carried through with remarkable competence. There is, however, a limitation in the methodology chosen for the analysis of the texts which are deductively used to illustrate particular points of the theory.

Patnaik seems not to have benefited from the examples of applied criticism in Sanskrit theoretical works and prefers to resort to paraphrase and statement of them characteristic of the Western critical practice. The author leaves out consideration of a basic problem in *rasa* analysis : how *rasas* identified in parts of a work can explain the *rasa* of the work as a whole. However, Dr. Patnaik's scholarship, analytical acumen and sensitivity to literary nuances as well as his taste in literature are commendable. One can not but acclaim his labours in this original work.

H. Panda

Bharat Gupt (Trans. and ed. with introduction) *Natyasastra* (of Bharata Muni), Chapter 28, Brahaspati Publications, New Delhi, 1993, pp. XXVIII + 203.

After his *Dramatic Concepts : Greek and Indian* Bharat Gupt renders recently a very useful service to the area of Indian musicology by translating one of the nine chapters Bharata devoted (28-36) to Indian *Gandharva* or Musicology (in his *Natyasastra*), into English. In doing so, he closely followed the commentaries of his teacher Acharya Brahaspati. The intention in translating the 28th chapter is to highlight the basic principles of Indian music such as *Svara*, *grama*, *murcchana*, *sruti* and *jati* as observed by the founders of Indian musical system -Bharata and his followers/ Matanga/ Bhoja and Sarngadeva etc. who were almost forgotten owing to the unavailability of their texts in print and in the event of which modern musicians like Bhatkhande and his printed compositions readily available were accepted as authorities in Indian musical tradition. Voices have also been raised that Bharata's music was rather a subordinate performance in accompaniment of the theatre than an autonomous art form. It is true that Bharata's *Sastra* deals with *abhinaya* or *natavyapara* as a whole, verbal art, visual art and histrionics forming its necessary constituents, and that literature, music and dance attained their autonomy not less than some five to seven centuries later. But Bharat's account of the *gandharva* is the most indispensable one in studying the fundamentals and authentic form of Indian music that developed from the Vedic tradition not only till the time of Bharata but also guiding the subsequent tradition that was not unnaturally susceptible to foreign influences in attaining its originality all through. Bharata's musical system is therefore not merely an historical phenomenon for us. It is of great philosophical significance that characterises the *Indianness* of Indian music and warns us against any confusion or cultural meddling that definitely threatens our cultural identity and aesthetic principles.

In his long introduction of twenty-eight pages, Gupt has offered a brief but illuminating picture of Bharata's system in comparison with the modern Indian practices, particularly his contextual references to the ancient Greek tradition inspire and encourage a strong desire, while setting the methodology, for the foundation of a new discipline which could properly be termed as comparative musicology (following the disciplines like comparative literature, comparative philosophy, comparative mythology, comparative religion etc.). In fact, when a contemporary connoisseur distinguishes "pure music" from its verbal association of any sort, Bharata's stress on the role of language in the generation of musical meaning (*artha nispati*) is of great philosophical significance which needs deeper aetiological analyses challenging the western theories and practices. This area is of absorbing interest and warrants immediate attention of both musicologists and musicians. Gupta writes :

"The present day utility of the twenty eighth chapter of the *Natyasastra* is not only for establishing continuity of Indian music by highlighting its characteristics like *Vadita*, *nyasa*, *apanyasa*, *sadava*, *andava* etc., but also for reconstructing the *jatis* as melodies. The *jatis* can be sung and played as the *ragas* and in doing so the *alapana* of the *jatis* is bound to sound like the *alampana* of the contemporary *ragas*... because the embellishments and ornamentations are contemporary and thus the result sounds like present day music" (p. XXV).

In translating the original *Natyasastra* with Acharya Brhaspati's commentary on it Gupt has wisely avoided any use of the parallel terms in Western usage. That would have resulted in great

confusion rather than any conceptual clarity. But a reader feels that there should have been the commentary of Abhinavagupta as well preceding *Sanjivanam* producing thereby a complete scholarship in the area. Perhaps Gupt would consider this suggestion worthwhile to incorporate Abhinava in the second edition of this work and would also incorporate the same in his forthcoming translation of the seventeenth chapter of *Natyasastra*.

Needless to say, musicologists and aestheticians in general are greatly benefited by Gupt's contribution, for which he, with his vast areas of experience in both performing music and theoretical understanding, seems to be singularly qualified in contemporary India. His further contributions are eagerly awaited.

A.C. Sukla

*Krishna Jain, Description in Philosophy : with Special Reference to Wittgenstein and Husserl*, D.K. Printworld, Delhi, 1994

The 20th century philosophy is marked by a shift of emphasis from the speculative philosophy to descriptive philosophy, from system building to piece-meal analysis, from Reality (with a capital R) to language and meaning. Yet this new trend in philosophy has been pursued in totally divergent background and set-up. The British and American philosophers (under the influence of British School) followed the line of linguistic analysis. But in Europe the phenomenologists followed a different path of analysis. In spite of certain strong points of similarities there is a tendency to dismiss one by the other. Those who are trained in Logico-linguistic analysis believe that phenomenological analysis is not worth it and vice versa. Even if the feeling of mutual neglect is no more that strong in present Indian academic scenario there seems to be a barrier in understanding both the parallel movements in a dispassionate way. Krishna Jain's book *Description in Philosophy* breaks this barrier and comes up with a brilliant exposition of both these trends as far as they claim to pursue the course of descriptive philosophy. Ms Jain in the preface of the book very clearly states "We are not ... concerned with the similarities and dissimilarities between Wittgenstein's analytical philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology but with the manner they pursued the concept of descriptive philosophy in their own philosophical set up".

In the 20th century, especially since 1920's philosophers have shown a clear aversion for speculative philosophy. The emphasis on a neat structure and order without caring for 'what there is' or 'what is given'. P.F. Strawson in his book *Individuals* brings out very clearly the distinction between the descriptive metaphysics and what he prefers to call the revisionary metaphysics in the following manner "Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, the revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure". For both - the ordinary language philosophers, including Strawson, and the phenomenologists like Husserl, aim at excavating the basic elements out of what is 'given either in language or in perception. As the author of the book puts very aptly, "A descriptive philosopher is satisfied with the elementary data i.e., with the basic bricks which are 'given' to him. He does not aspire to construct theories or systems out of them". His method is analytical and his aim is clarification of the philosophical puzzles. So both Husserl and Wittgenstein approach their task concentrating on the problem of 'meaning'. Besides, both the philosophers claim to dissociate themselves from psychologism and empiricism, (as it is understood in ordinary philosophical parlance).

The first chapter of the book entitled 'The Concept of Description' very lucidly brings out the basic features of descriptive philosophy, on the one hand she demarcates the scope and method of descriptive philosophy, on the other hand she keeps on showing the distinction between the Husserlian

approach and the Wittgensteinian approach in very clear terms. It is no mean task and the introductory chapter itself ushers in the readers to follow her analysis of Wittgenstein and Husserl presented in subsequent chapters without any bias and unfounded presuppositions.

However, the last two chapters on the limits of Description and hazards of philosophical Description really deserves attention. She very clearly brings out the paradoxes involved in outcome of pursuing the programme of descriptive philosophy by both - Wittgenstein and Husserl, the goal of pure descriptive philosophy. Both despised system building and in other words metaphysics of any sort. Yet both of them in their last analysis end up with the concepts of 'forms of life' and 'life-world', respectively. These concepts serve as the limits of description and they truly belong to the area of 'showing' rather than 'saying'.

But what is the basic nature of these two limiting concepts? If their structure is fixed then we are back to 'revisionary metaphysics' if not speculative metaphysics. And if they accept that the concepts of 'forms of life' and 'life-world' are dynamic and they are not free of socio-cultural frame-work then their programme may lead us to philosophical anthropology. The way the author exposes the 'hazards' makes one convinced that there is no final word in philosophy.

The book published in 1994 has already become very popular with the scholars as also useful for the students who often grapple with the philosophical thoughts of these two very difficult philosophers and often are left with too many questions unanswered.

**Tandra Patnaik**  
Utkal Univesity.

**Madhusudan Pati, *Bhagavadgita : A Literary Elucidation* , Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1997, PP.210.**

The text of the *Bhagavadgita* (commonly known as the *Gita* ) containing eighteen chapters of seven hundred stanzas was composed sometime between the 2nd half of the 2nd c. and the 1st half of the 1st century B.C. by a dualist school of devotees of Lord Visnu known as *Ekanti Vaisnavas* and the text was later interpolated into the *Mahabharata*. The title in its feminine gender is an adjective for noun *Upanisad* (feminine gender in Sanskrit) omitted in use. Thus the title means "An upanisad sung by Bhagawan (Sri Krishna)". Although it has been treated as a philosophical text by its innumerable commentators over centuries from Sankara (8th C. A.D.) till date, the very title suggests that it is basically a literary genre - a 'song' or 'Gita'. As S.N. Dasgupta has stated : "It is its lack of system and method which gives it its peculiar charm more akin to the poetry of the upanisads than to the dialectical and systematic Hindu thought." But the text has so far been rarely treated as a literary genre of the Upanisadic nature as Dasgupta has very rightly observed. Even Abhinavagupta (10th C. AD) India's most celebrated aesthetician has not done so in his commentary, although he has noted the allegorical character of the text while accommodating the text's *message* within his own school of Kashmirian non-dualism.

Among the moderns, Wilhelm Von Humboldt, who understood the *Gita* "as the most beautiful, presumably the only real philosophical poem of all known literatures", has traced its "rich philosophical ideas" rather than any literary characteristics. Similarly, Aurobindo has sought for a "message" in the text though not by any "scholastic or academic scrutiny" : "We approach it for help and light and our aim must be to distinguish its essential and living message, on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare". Even Dasgupta himself has read the *Gita* as a philosophical text, rather than as a poetic text of the Upanisadic genre.

Against this background, a reader of Pati's title is immediately enthusiastic for finding out the points which have been omitted by Abhinavagupta and Dasgupta as also expects from a literary scholar of Pati's rank (mentioned in the jacket of the book) interpretation of a philosophical poem imbibing insights and arguments from recent interdisciplinary canons developed by Western scholars : for example, Stephen D. Ross (*Literature and Philosophy* 1969) and Stein Haugom Olsen ("Thematic Concepts : where Philosophy meets Literature" in *Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by A.P.Griffiths, 1984). Though the genres elucidated by these authors vary—Ross's being novels by Hesse, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Camus

and Olsen's being Euripides' play *Hippolytus* — both of them agree that “literary appreciation always and necessarily involves the recognition of theme...thematic concepts are constitutive of literary appreciation, and the nature of thematic concepts becomes a central problem in literary aesthetics....literary interpretation should employ conceptual frameworks which are not only not generally known to an educated public but which are dependent for their significance on special theories about the human mind, society, language etc.” These thematic concepts such as freedom, determinism, responsibility, weakness of will, human suffering, divine order, purity, pollution, forgiveness in terms of which Olsen interprets *Hippolytus* are obviously philosophical phenomena, which define *mortal questions* the questions which are concerned with “mortal life : how to understand it and how to live it”. They are permanent foci of interest in a culture because they are unavoidable. The concepts which define these mortal questions are the fingerprints of the culture.

Needless to say, the Gita abounds in these mortal questions : determinism/freedom of will, action/inaction/evil action(Karma/ akarma/vikarma), love/detachment, divinity/mortality, man-in-God/ God-in-man so on and so forth. Finally, the language of the Gita, modelled upon the language of the Upanisads is essentially the language of metaphor, irony and paradox, the paradigms of poetic expression theorised by the New critics and illustrated *per se* by T.S. Eliot.

The *Gita* is a narrative within a narrative and the whole of this narrative represents the psychic events rather than any physical action of the protagonist who is initially a demigod finally metamorphosed to a God-in-man, the *somum bonum* of human life that answers to a number of *mortal questions*. The reader of Pati's books rightly expects a systematic analysis of the structure of the narrative distinguishing several phases of the metamorphosis of the protagonist in different chapters and there should have been a separate chapter on the language of this narrative. But instead the reader is bored by the canto-wise-commentary type of chapterisation without any titles although the text itself bears separate titles for different chapters.

Pati rightly considers the narrative as an *itihasa* itself within a longer *itihasa*. But he confuses *itihasa* with history. Abhinavagupta's analysis of the term *itihasa* in his commentary on Bharata's *Natyasastra* (Chap.I) has demonstrated the Indian sense of *itihasa* as a series of events not chronologically happening but archetypally recurring. The author writes a paragraph on the nature of the poetry of the Gita: “It is therefore a specific kind of poetry that is pressed into service here poetry that is non-discursive, non-ornamented and immediately visionary, poetry that is dramatically self-conscious, but yet essentially self-effacing. It is a poetry which is in close conformity with its philosophy, one that is appropriate to the mood both of detached, inspired action, and of *Prapatti*. It is poetry, again, which is in intimate correspondence with the qualities of the protagonists involved in the drama, spanning the ordinarily human and the awe-inspiringly cosmic, the metaphysical and the philosophical exquisitely merging into each other. But for all that, it is poetry of a high order, one that consistently effaces itself for high drama and high philosophy, and yet retains its special distinctiveness and power. The philosophy of the poem is a part of an *itihasa*; The message is addressed to a particular mood in a given situation, its universals being made pointedly meaningful in a given context. Poetry, therefore, acquires here a profound functional validity”, (PP 2-3).

The entire paragraph is only full of sound and fury; and without proper definition and application of the ideas in the text itself it signifies nothing. It is very hard to understand the difference between philosophy and metaphysics that the author frequently draws. Most surprisingly contradictory is the author's statement against his proposal that he has highlighted the significant elements of poetic style and dramatic structure *only selectively at particular points*, (P.VI).

When the whole book is designed to elucidate the Gita as a literary text, a dramatic poem then how could he highlight the poetic style and the dramatic structure *only selectively* ?

The author's knowledge of Sanskrit is obviously poor. One of the several mistakes he commits in interpreting Sanskrit words is his translation of the root *muh* in *buddhim mohaya siva me* as



“ambivalent” and self-contradictory- the proper meaning being “confusing one’s understanding”: His complain against the English translations of the Gita as failing to capture the tonal beauties of the original (P.VI) is only pretentious, he himself failing to capture these beauties. He should be aware of Humboldt’s experience in this regard...“ I concede that one who reads it in a translation only, even the best one, can not have such a feeling. The translation of such a work is like the description of a painting: colours and light are missing”. Pati’s failure in commenting on the poetic language of the Gita is obviously due to his lack of necessary acquaintance with the nuances of Sanskrit language in general and with the Sanskrit poetic style in particular. The poorest show of the book is the absence of a bibliography. How many translations he has consulted ? Is only two-those of Chinmayanada and Goenkas as he writes in the preface ? Biharilal’s Oriya translation follows Sridhara’s (14thc. A.D.) Sanskrit commentary. Among the galaxy of commentators from Sankara to Madhusudana Saraswati, apart from Wilkins, A.W.Schlegel, Humboldt and Hegel how does the author dare to choose only three!- recording his “perceptions and reactions in a free unpretentious manner”? Even Sankara the first commentator of the Gita had to labour very hard to cover all the scriptures that preceded him. Even the Gita itself refers to *Brahmasutras* and Sankhya-Yoga system(s) of thought that preceded its composition. To put it ironically, without any notes of reference, without any bibliography, without any acknowledgement to any of the critics, translators and commentators Pati’s book appears more apocalyptic than the Apocalypse itself !

A.C. Sukla