

K.B. GOEL: CRITICAL WRITINGS ON ART 1957-1998. By Shruti Parthasarathy (Ed). New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2020. 430+1 pp.

In the introduction to her book, Parthasarathy begins by drawing attention to K.B. Goel's responses to "the avant-garde and the postmodern" (xvii). She dedicates specific sections to the discussion on Marcel DuChamp's rejection of Modernism (xxi-xxii), Cubism and Minimalism, working her way through Goel's skepticism towards the computerization of art and its subsequent ramifications that changed its traditional course (xxv). Using Walter Benjamin as a launch pad, she notes how Goel raises but refuses to answer the question on the inclusion of photography, and its contribution to art (xxx). In the final section, she displays his gradual conservatism from earlier political tendencies by mysticizing his politically motivated criticism, referring to how his inclination for the *Ishopanishad* defined the apparent transcendental standards of Eastern art (xxxix-xl). The Book is divided into five sections. In 'Artists', Goel makes a few standard observations – how Indian painters become repetitive in their methods, lacking an experimental zeal (5), on the dispassionate nature of Jamini Roy's paintings (23), the implications of *angst* in postmodern art (in refutation of Modernism/s) (36), the manners involved in assessing Hussain's art outside the domain of "normally satisfying aesthetics" (48) and so on. Furthermore, Hussain's art becomes reminiscent of what Goel calls "ethnic memories" (58), by which I understand a memory fed by sublated ethnic constructions. F.N Souza contributes to the making of a modern day Hindu *bewusstsein* nurtured on Intuitions, although the author does not qualify which aspects of his paintings are singular and immediate. Satish Gujral exhibits the extremities of an artistic enterprise, while the author tracks a decisive lack of influence of Dada painters in Indian art. Goel makes a seminal statement when he says that "Modernism in India came as an assertion against the all-pervasive cultural nationalism as represented by the Bengal school of painters in the pre-independence period" (144) – something that is worth investigating in all its umpteen varieties. This section closes off with an attempt at critiquing photography as an aesthetic medium of experience (158-161). In 'Institutions' an important contribution of Goel could be considered his criticism of the Lalit Kala Akademi that faltered at several junctures. His solution is to educate art enthusiasts in "art-history consciousness" (173) before striving to remedy fundamental problems related with administration and funds. A historical account of Western art draws flak when "provincialisms" (180) take the upper hand. In 'Triennale-India', there are brief studies of art exhibitions across India. Here, he praises Bhupen Khakhar for the *factness* of his art (211), ending with a brief paragraph on Kitsch. In 'Art and Ideas', he studies Minimalism and the basis of its "semantic tease" (223), reverting back to improvements for the LKA, such as an "anechoic chamber" (237) which should enhance the values of aesthetic experience. Depression Years force artists to come to terms with social realities, often mitigating them from pursuing what is truly great, instead limiting themselves in exhibitions and business transactions. 'Art's distorting Mirror of Consciousness' is a reasonable explanation of every-thing argued for by Goel in this section, barring explicit references to politics. The volume culminates with essays on photography, Goel's reviews and catalogues of solo exhibitions.

While the editor must be lauded for taking upon herself a task that is the first of its kind, and while the reviewer concedes to the exclusion of ideas not directly pertaining to art criticism, two criticisms of K.B. Goel's commentary on art must not be overlooked – first, there is a decisive lack of intense philosophical, aesthetic or literary reflection, causing the reviews to be lightweight and subject to popular ignorance. Even the best of journalistic criticism is often well-written than well-argued; second, the epigrammatic nature that his writing takes refuge in functions as a bane in absence of true authenticity, missing the nail and lacking any very deep impact from without. Nevertheless, the volume will serve as an inspiration for art critics in the future.

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THE DEATH SCRIPT: DREAMS AND DELUSIONS IN NAXAL COUNTRY. By Ashutosh Bhardwaj. New Delhi: Fourth Estate India/Harper Collins, 2020. 269 pp.

Already and rightly reviewed by others as a 'genre-bender' (Aditya Mani Jha, Hindu Business Line) Ashutosh Bhardwaj's *The Death Script: Dreams and Delusions in Naxal Country* is undoubtedly a striking work of non-fiction, from the pages of which, however, a fiction-writer keeps rearing his head, till the attuned-reader is left searching for the artist within his art (perhaps much to the chagrin of T S Eliot!). Yes, celebrated journalist of several years, the author, perhaps, at last, consciously seeks to break free from the inevitable trammels imposed by the reticence required of journalistic writing, to consciously cross over to the luxuries of emotional repose and stability offered by the craft of the novelist. Is it a weary bid to escape the 'corpses pinned to the tip of his fountain pen' (*DS* 240) or perhaps a final 'death script' to bury the death reporter within him, forever? Is *The Death Script* then mere reportage of Maoist-Police skirmishes, or rather the checkered journey of awakening, an internal *rites de passage* – of crossing the threshold of comforting, and comfortable, lifelong-certainties into stark realities painfully acquired? For one, *The Death Script* is a gripping narrative, with all the potential of a *künstlerroman*, ready to sprout whenever the optimum conditions prevail, and, if one may say so, even a brilliant swan song, for the purely journalistic self of the author, all blended into one.

A book in its physical, tangible avatar, even in the age of Kindle-Readers and e-books, still carries a lot of currency and meaning – as is the case with the hardcover edition of *The Death Script*. The strategically placed black pages, which separate the different sections, act as fitting palls for the legions of deaths and dead bodies that this author has been witness to, in the years of reporting from the conflict-zone in Bastar – alternately labelled India's 'Red Corridor'. One is instantly taken back to the artistry of the novel *Tristram Shandy*, the eighteenth century English masterpiece by Laurence Sterne, which threw intellectual challenges, in its own time, to its readers at critical junctures in the narrative by inserting blank or black pages, and if not thoroughly *performative* like *Tristram Shandy*,