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Sharing a Future: Looking from Cultural Perspectives at Possibilities of Pan-Asianness[1]

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Introduction

Geographers in recent times have critiqued the politics of 'earth labelling' through the constitution of continents. Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, for instance, in their influential book The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography argue that continents are irrelevant from geographical points of view. Analysis of floral, faunal and tectonic factors from the perspective of Zoogeography and Geology, they observe, would render the traditional continental division untenable. The taxonomy of continents is seen as a geopolitically constructed discourse to support the European hegemonic designs. The construction of Asia – the name itself having its origin in European mythology – is intricately connected with this ideological design. Edward Said, on the basis of his short analysis of a pair of plays – Aeschylus's The Persians and Euripides's The Bacchae – observes that the two aspects of the Orient that distinguished it from the West in the plays mentioned above will remain essential motifs of European imagination: first, 'Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant…. It is Europe that articulates the Orient'; secondly, the Orient is seen as 'insinuating danger' because rationality is 'undermined by Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values' (Said 57). Asia was posited as Europe's 'other', an entity which accommodates the opposite and undesirable identities. It is in this process that other religious, cultural and even political ideologies like Islam, Judaism and Communism were embedded in the 'other' site. As Said says, 'the Orient, when it was not merely a place in which one traded, was culturally, intellectually, spiritually outside Europe and European civilization' (Said 71). The creation of 'Asia', with all its Orientalist associations, validates the distinctive identity of Europe and its superiority over Asia, its immediate neighbour.

As part of the process of 'otherisation', Asia and its people have been stereotyped. Literary creation of characters like Charlie Chan, a detective of Chinese descent, in the American context and the popularity of the films based on his character and exploits – forty eight Charlie Chan films were made – indicate the reception level of stereotyped versions of 'Oriental' characters[2]. Rachel C. Lee contends that popular magazines of

the 1910s characterized Asians as less evolved, and a mass of 'undifferentiated difference', as unclean, and finally as unknowable (Lee 249). She asserts that the journals of the decade often appropriated scientific rhetoric (mainly the rhetoric of evolution and sanitation) to argue that Asians should not be allowed to be assimilated into the fabric of Western humanity. Rohmer's thirteen Fu Manchu books, according to her, 'helped to justify the many violences in America directed towards Asians (economic discrimination, political disenfranchisement, physical assault, social segregation, and exclusion from immigration) by framing that violence as a necessary means to preserve the integrity of Western character' (Lee 260). Asia had even been an archive of knowledge about 'peoples of peculiar habits and odd and even monstrous physiognomies' (Menon 60). Although European travellers' visits to India, China and other parts of the continent during the medieval period and their immediate contact with the inhabitants of the areas widened the archive of European knowledge, there was no significant change in overall European attitude to Asia. Marco Polo's Description of the World (1324) is regarded by Donald Lach as 'the first comprehensive and authoritative account of the East produced before 1550' (qtd. in Menon 60) in Europe and it also brought Japan's existence to the European knowledge for the first time. For a long time the territorial and ideological configuration of Asia revolved round India. The concept began to change only with the European imperialist engagement with the continent. The imperialist desire necessarily presupposes the project of territorial expansion and of governance out of which a better picture of cartographic details and profiles of the peoples emerge. Day to day interaction with the people of a country dispelled much of the wild Orientalist assumptions nurtured throughout the ages but nevertheless the main driving force was sustained through re-formed ideological formulations having its roots in the old Orientalist paradigms. Sridevi Menon foregrounds this aspect when she observes that 'Asia' was a later formulation, which absorbed the existing ideas regarding the Orient:

> Asia as a defined geographic region did not emerge until the rise of European colonial expansion when imperial boundaries and notions of territoriality inscribed new politics. The Orient as an imagined landscape therefore predated 'Asia' and was intrinsically the site that informed 'Asia.' On the other hand, in the European consciousness, Asia could not exist without the Orient, since the cultural meanings that informed this region were drawn from an archive that preceded 'Asia.' On the other hand, not until the conceptualization of Asia as a geocultural

> space by European imperial ambitions was the Orient's otherness increasingly narrated through discourses of race. (Menon 60)

While in the European imaginary and cartographic reality Asia existed and exists as a continent in order to justify Europe's superiority, there has been no equivalent passion among the Asians to identify themselves as Asians. Individuals, firmly located in the material conditions of the nation states, are mainly concerned with regional, religious, class and caste politics and hardly go beyond the national identities. Rustom Bharucha has rightly pointed out, 'In this turbulent domain encompassing any number of identarian debates around caste, community, religion, gender, region, language and nation, the belongingness to a larger imagined community called Asia does not exist' (Bharucha xvi).

Yet the name and icon of Asia is often invoked by Asians to exploit the European weakness for remote and exhilarating locale in Asia to advance their own material gains. Television advertisements such as 'Malaysia, truly Asia' broadcasted and telecasted by Malaysian Tourism and spread through the internet by Tourism India, is accompanied by visuals to attract Euro-American tourists. The carefully chosen words in the advertisement suggest an inclusive concept of Asia. While the words in the advertisement refer to a geographical entity, they also suggest the presence of an essence which can be extracted from that entity. This idea of an 'essence' of the continent is in fact an appropriation of the European concept that underlies the Orientalist paradigm and is displayed for the gaze of the Western tourists. In fact, the topographical differences within Asia are so pronounced and Asian nations are so varied and heterogeneous from religious, social and cultural points of view that a unified, undifferentiated, essentialist concept of Asia appears to be no more than a Western construction. Asians themselves, as has been mentioned earlier, are hardly aware of such an 'essence' which marks them off as different. On the contrary, there have been both intra-national conflicts (the Civil War in Sri Lanka, movement for democracy in Myanmar) and inter-nation rivalries and wars (Indo-Pakistan Wars, for instance). Issues like 'Partition of India' or the creation of an independent Bangladesh out of Pakistan have contributed to a considerable amount of political bitterness in the region. Japan's imperialist designs in the past have also been noted by scholars who regard them as an impediment in the realization of a greater unity. Menon's discussion of an aggressive variety of Japanese nationalism, for instance, indicates the dangers lurking in many of the existing discourses:

> Convergence of Japanese military aspirations in the region with

> its imaginative geography therefore prevents any sense of shared fraternal sympathies. Thus, for instance, Japanese racialisation of Koreans as inferior peoples and painful memories of Japanese occupation in Korea make an unmarked Asian identity in Asia impossible. (Menon 62)

In the context of such an environment, the question naturally crops up: how far is the concept of pan-Asian fraternity practicable? This article will try to explore the above question from cultural points of view. In the process, it will examine some pan-Asian discourses and their implications, and will discuss earlier attempts at forging an Asian fraternity in the American diasporic space. The success achieved through such attempts indicates the possibilities of forging a similar bond in Asia itself through cultural activities like building up theatre movements and publishing and circulating anthologies of writings from across different Asian countries.

The Pan-Asian Imagination

Historically, there have been attempts by the Asians to figure out the concept of Asia, but that has been usually embedded either in the nationalist ideology or in the anti-West rhetoric. As a corollary of such attempts, discourses of some kind of pan-Asianness has also surfaced. Rustom Bharucha in his book Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin (2006) demonstrates how Okakura Tenshin's theory of a unified Asia was informed by a civilizational discourse which basically produced the thesis of the superiority of Japan. Tenshin advanced this 'One Asia' thesis in his book The Ideals of the East (1903) where he speaks eloquently of 'two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its Communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of Vedas' which defy 'the Himalayan divide and unite the Asians in civilizational terms. His vision embraces three civilizations – India, China and Japan – Japan being most prominent one in his own scheme of things. He observes that 'not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and the Universal which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce the great religions of the world'. Okakura saw Asia as a 'united living organism, each part depends on all the others, the whole breathing a single, complex life.' The cultural geography of Asia envisioned by him is 'an imaginary unity of shared ideals' (qtd. in Bharucha 16-17). The three crucial elements in Okakura's artistic pedagogy – tradition, nature and originality – are closely intersected, and none dominating over the others, but in the civilizational discourse he prioritizes Japan as the focal point where the two other

civilizations merge to create a unique pan-Asian model. Bharucha critiques his basic contention in the following way:

> In Okakura's Asian Triangle, however, there is no such inner dynamism, with Japan positioned at the apex of the triangle, embodying in its artistic heritage the synthesis of Indian religion (represented by the 'individualism of the Vedas') and Chinese communitarian ethics (represented, somewhat misleadingly, by 'the Communism of Confucius'). Unlike the magnetic triangle of Okakura's aesthetic model where tradition, nature and originality impact on each other, there has been no such interaction in Okakura's civilizational model. Within his hierarchical framing, the civilization of India and China are primary sources of knowledge, but in the final analysis, rather like the tributaries of a river they flow into the mainstream of Japanese art, where Asia in all its diversities is 'protected' and 'restored'. (Bharucha 17)

Interestingly, Sister Nivedita, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote an introduction for Okakura's book, views Asia as a metaphysical and spiritual idea rather than a territorial and political entity. The kind of 'febrile form of Japanese nationalism' which Bharucha's study of Okakura's The Ideals of the East has brought out is intrinsically problematic in the context of pan-Asian studies as it impedes a dialogic construction of collaborative efforts with the perception of possible fields of cultural interaction and people to people contact.

Menon too reveals that the Japanese elites in the nineteenth century posited the centrality of the Japanese in the scheme called Toyoshi or Oriental history. This is a counter discourse of Orientalism rooted in Japan's envisioning of itself as a civilizing and unifying force in East Asia. Taking the insights provided by Stefan Tanaka in his book Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History, Menon observes that since 'the conception of Toyo, or the Orient delineates a geographic space identified in Asia, it is possible to construe the Japanese as historically thinking about the region in pan-Asian terms' (Menon 62). Aggressive pan-Asianness, based on the East versus West binary was also forged after World War I in response to the US racial policy against Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Thus, anti-Western impulse provided a basis for Japanese and Korean elites to share a pan-Asian ideology.

The narrowness of nationalist schemes is evident in the Japanese ideal of the East which has been discussed above. The same kind of

narrowness is also found in another form in Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's call to unite against the West which, as Menon rightly points out, is based on the concept of an Asia forged through Muslim solidarity. His advocacy of pan-Asian Islamic nationalism is seen as an attempt towards consolidation of the Southeast Asia as the site of an 'Asian Renaissance'. Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore valorizes Confucianism as the civilizational discourse that defines Asia (Menon 61,77). Menon thus concludes from the above trends that the 'significance of being Asian in Asia then is contingent on the histories and political alliances being forged among nations in the region and in the integration of these alliances in the capitalist world system'(Menon 61). The same trend has been noticed by Bharucha also in course of his own active participation in inter-Asian theatre workshops and productions which were mostly centred in Singapore. He observes on the basis of his own experience that 'Asia-centricity could be the other side of the same coin as Eurocentricity' (Bharucha xv). He elaborates on how his own expectation of a pan-Asian cultural collaboration was belied:

> What appeared a refreshing contrast to the Eurocentric discourse and practice of interculturalism, marked by appropriation, decontextualization, and cultural tourism, gradually began to take on more political dimensions as I became aware of the heavy investment in 'Asia' as state determined cultural capital. Over the years this capital has accumulated through accretions of intellectual and political discourse relating to Asian Values, the Asian Renaissance, and more recent propagation of New Asia, under whose aegis the state of Singapore has attempted to sell itself as 'the global city of the arts.' (Bharucha xv)

Underlying Bharucha's observations is his distrust of particular political, religious and capitalist ideologies that appropriates all forms of artistic-cultural activities in its proclaimed exercise of initiating and continuing a cultural dialogue in its own terms. Such attempts, for all practical purposes, subvert or sabotage pan-Asian dialogues.

Visions of Pan-Asian Dialogues

An effective cultural dialogue can perhaps be initiated not through state apparatus, which has its own interests to serve and has at its disposal tools to coerce, overtly or covertly, cultural activists who believe in transcultural dialogue and want to bridge the gaps existing between Asian nations. What is urgently needed is people-to-people contactbecause pan-Asianness cannot ensue only from state endeavours that, more often not, divide peoples rather than unite them. Cultural activists often have to

negotiate state prohibitions. Passports, visas and other documents of permission are used to great effect by state authorities for restrictive purposes, particularly with respect to people to people contact involving other nations with particular history of rivalry and bitterness. Not much has been done in Asia to promote cultural understanding between peoples at the ground level. That is perhaps because there has not been much of counter-constructions of the Asian identity by the Asians. At the literary-cultural level, a proliferation of attempts to project a pan-Asian image requires a perception of commonalities among Asians. There is, of course, enough evidence of historical intersections and common cultural traits which may be explored at the intellectual levels for the perception of the commonalities of the people. Since there are many Asias in Asia, and differences may overweigh the commonalities, attempts may initially be taken at the regional level (South Asia, or Southeast Asia, for instance) which may gradually embrace the whole of continent. Literary-cultural anthologies could provide a platform for multilayered discussion through multicultural and multinational writings with English as the common and unifying language. Translation would be an excellent means for understanding other cultures and for perceiving identity of cultural groups. Bilingual anthologies with indigenous writings and translated versions may be encouraged. There are many excellent short stories in different languages which promote the concept of transnational 'travels' which problematise the idea of 'foreignness' and thereby bring out human traits that triumph over narrow identitarian politics. Two such short stories, which demand translation into English and inclusion into anthologies, shall be discussed here. This will lead to the consolidation of pan-Asian efforts to improve 'Asian' identity and to the lessening of gaps between the local and the 'global'. Moreover, allowing plurality within unity would prevent monologic debates.

One model of achieving such consolidation may be through the conglomeration of different opinions and points of views. An anthology is a site where such multiple voices may enter into a dialogic relationship. Anthologies in fact in such a perspective have not received as much attention as they should have. The efficacy of the anthologies has been proved in the context of pan-Asian understanding in the American diaspora where, in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement, Asians felt it necessary to come together to contest the hegemony of the mainstream American culture. On the basis of an assumed sense of community women having ancestral roots in Asia too had the urge to consolidate. The anthologies were consciously planned as part of the politics of ethnicity and feminism, and

were published by small ethnic and feminist presses/collectives. Some such publishers are the Asian American Writers' Workshop, a non-profit collective with small financial resources, Calyx, 'an organization of dedicated sisters', Aunt Lute books, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press and the like. Organized groups of committed women, like Women of South Asian Descent Collective and Asian Women United of California, undertook the task of editing some of the anthologies. The titles of the anthologies usually project the anger, anguish, resistance and the need for a strategic alliance: AIIIEEEEE!, The Big Aiiieeeee!, Charlie Chan is Dead, The Forbidden Stitch, Making Waves, Our Feet Walk the Sky, Home to Stay and so on. These anthologies present a wide variety of voices which interrogate stereotypes and hegemonic constructions of Asian men and women. They tried to build up cultural or gender coalitions as a strategy to counter attempts of controlling their voices. Jessica Hagedorn, a Filipino American writer, took upon herself the task of debunking the stereotypes and presenting a real picture of what Asians in America think, act, write and are like in reality. She edited an anthology of Asian American fiction significantly titled Charlie Chan is Dead (1993), where she blasts the 'demeaning legacy of stereotypes' like the Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu characters. Hagedorn notes the absence of counteractive efforts in the past, as the community had been unusually patient. She asserts that she 'created' the anthology for the 'selfish' reason that she wanted to read a book that had never been available to her in the past (Hagedorn xxx).3 However, prior to Hagedorn's anthology, Frank Chin, Jeffrey P. Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong collected some forgotten Asian American writers in a polemical anthology with the title AIIIEEEEE! (1974). These authors severely attacked the stereotyping of the Asians by the white Americans. The Asian is represented as one, to use Chin'swords, 'utterly without manhood…at worst, the Asian American is contemptible because he is womanly, effeminate, devoid of all traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage and creativity' (qtd. in Cheung 237). This justifiably invited strong protests from Asian American feminist writers who label editors as 'masculinists'. In an article the noted Asian American feminist critic King-kok Cheung, for instance, has pointed out that the AIIIEEEEE! editors have in fact resorted to another type of stereotyping. They have, in her view, disparaged domestic efficiency as 'feminine' and slotted desirable traits such as originality, daring, physical courage and creativity under the rubric of masculinity (Cheung 237). Nevertheless AIIIEEEEE! and the subsequent volume published much later Big AIIIEEEEE! (1991) are important steps towards establishing a tradition of literary writings by Asians in the American diaspora. The earlier

volume set the tone of anger and frustration of the community for being excluded and discriminated. The editors observed that the white American culture pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering whined, shouted or screamed "aiiieeeee!" Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AIIIEEEEE!!! It is more than a whine, shout or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice. (Chan et al. vii-viii)

An interesting feature of the anthologies is that the editors or publishers, while stressing the uniqueness of Asian American experience do not deny the 'common threads' among different ethnic groups. They in fact celebrate the idea of cultural differences in the multicultural space. And they show an awareness of the broader perspectives within which they work. This is what Jane Singh, in her 'Foreword' to Our Feet Walk the Sky emphasizes,

> It is through the voices in this volume that we begin to see how women of South Asian origin locate their positions within their respective communities, within wider interethnic networks, and within national and international, social, economic and political frameworks which impact upon women's lives, both in the United States and in South Asia.' (Singh vii)

While discussing how to approach an Asian American text Sau-lin Cynthia Wong refers to an approach which, allied with the 'race, class and gender school', offers a 'minority discourse framework' that 'shifts critical focus away from minority-white relations to minority-minority relations. Its premise is that shared historical experiences of oppression have created affinities among minorities that cannot be adequately addressed by a model centered on hegemonic culture' (Wong 4). This approach may be very relevant in the Asian geo-cultural context where the postcolonial countries have a shared history of subjugation and western domination. It is because of a perception of threat from the West that the need to fall back on pan-Asianism has been felt. Although political consolidation and solidarity may be an urgent necessity, more secure and permanent understanding will be on the literary-cultural front where possibilities of popular and activist support and building of infrastructure may be explored. It may, however, be mentioned that in Asia no proper, tangible literary efforts like launching anthologies have come to our notice. Only a few very preliminary, but potentially fruitful, attempts have been made. I shall mention here three anthologies that are the result of transcultural cooperation at the broad

regional level (i.e. South Asia or South East Asia) and which may bloom into full-grown pan-Asian literary fraternity in future.

A coming together of people of diverse backgrounds, however, is not easy. Bonding has to be created and sustained on the basis of a genuine urge. Wong rightly asserts,

> Nevertheless this subsumption of identity as Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese etc. in the larger pan-Asian identity has to be voluntarily adopted and highly context-sensitive in order to work; it is not meant to obscure the unique experiences of each sub-group, but merely to provide an instrument for political mobilization under chosen circumstances. (Wong 6)

Wong furthermore, in referring to the Asian American resistance to an official form designed by the US Bureau of the Census for 1990 census in which one could write in specific labels under the umbrella category of 'Asian or Pacific Islander' observes that the success of the resistance ensued from the collective endeavour:

> In this instance, Asian American subgroup acted in coalition but the goal of such action is to ensure that interests of diverse subgroups do not get erased: they united with each other in order to protect their separate interests. In doing so, they illustrate one social science theory that sees ethnic groups as interest groups – political coalitions – rather than anthropological, cultural, linguistic or religious ones. (Wong 7)

While the political coalition of the Asian groups in the diaspora was prominently visible, the less visible but equally important was the 'emergent and evolving textual coalition'. Wong, interestingly, conceives of 'a professional coalition of Asian American critics' who would promote the textual coalition of the creative writers. The approach of the critics would be thematic mainly because there intersections and intertexuality could be discovered. Wong's own approach, as she says, is based on 'contexts' and 'intertexts' (Wong 10). By using the word 'contexts' she conveys the 'indispensability of historical knowledge to any responsible reading of the corpus' (Wong 10) and the pluralization of the word indicates that 'there is no single, conclusive version of Asian American history to anchor their works and safeguard "correct" readings' (Wong 10). She adopts Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which regards every text to be constructed as 'a mosaic of quotations' and 'the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 37), and explores a wide range of

possible interests for the Asian American works:

> What interests me first and foremost is how mutual allusion, qualification, complication, and transmutation can be discovered between texts regarded as Asian American, and how a sense of an internally meaningful literary tradition may emerge from such an investigation. (Wong 11)

The texts grouped under Asian American rubric, she says, 'build upon, allude to, refine, controvert, and resonate with each other. In doing so they contribute to a sense of an Asian American literary tradition' (Wong 12).

If the Asians can build up a 'textual coalition' in the American diaspora, there is no reason why the same example cannot be followed in Asia proper. One can envisage a 'textual coalition' where the emphasis will be to do away with the sense of distance and mutual 'foreignness' and establish a pan-Asian fraternal space. This can best be done in English which has wide currency in most of the countries by virtue of their being ex-colonies of the British Empire. In view of the rapid growth of economic and commercial prowess of some Asian nations, the medium may as well be a very convenient vehicle for artistic creations. There are some zones in Asia where nations have a history of common cultural traits or even share a common historical trauma. Anthologies based on creative and critical writings may create an environment of understanding and critical revaluations.

(Re)writing Asia and Why It Matters

In Asia proper, there is no essentialist demand for cultural nationalism, nothing that can be compared to the situation which gave rise to the Asian American identity during and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. But the mere fact that the diverse Asian national groups can come together gives hope to similar cultural consolidation in Asia. Considering the fact that friendly relations existed between nations and travellers of various hues reinforced the economic and cultural connections, there is no reason why the same sentiments cannot be reasserted. Reading literary works of other countries is a kind of cultural travel and cultural mapping that is free of hegemonic trappings. If the works of different countries can be brought together within the scope of anthologies, the strong bonds based on commonalities can be established, and the sense of 'foreignness' and mutual incompatibilities can be dissipated.

There is already a tradition of creative writings in English in different Asian countries. Despite internal oppositions to the English language, mainly

for nationalistic reasons, English has thrived as a medium of communication and creative literatures.[4] For historical reasons it has developed roots in different countries and globalization has reinforced an effective circulation of the language not only in Asia but also in the countries all over the world. The economic prowess gained by the Asian countries in the last one decade or two has further developed the chances of the English language as the link language. In such a context, English seems to be the natural choice for the cultural activists in Asia. Anthologists like Mohammad A. Quayum, however, have some reservations regarding the narrow technological and economic spirit which dominates in Singapore and Malaysia and kills the spirit of imagination(Quayum xi). He also mentions Edwin Thumboo, one of the early poets in Singapore, who is pained to observe the overriding commercial fascination of Singapore and how it affected the writer. But both Quayum and Thumboo underline the importance of English in literary exercises. Thumboo observes in the 'General Introduction' to The Fiction of Singapore (1990) that the 'position [of English] as pivotal, bridge language, has strengthened [in Singapore] since 1985' (qtd. in Quayum xiii). Its importance has been acknowledged and accepted in many Asian countries. John McRae points out that

> the geography of writing in English is extending its boundaries to grow far beyond the old colonial dimensions. Writing in English is not the prerogative only of countries which have emerged from British or American colonial domination. In Thailand, for example, Pira Sudham writes in English….In Indonesia, where the colonial presences were Dutch and Portuguese, linguistic identity and cultural roots are constantly under discussion and English writing although very much the expression of a minority of writers and readers, is the major vehicle for international recognition. (MacRae 11-12)

McRae points out that the South East Asian countries, principally Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines (with Myanmar/ Burma on the sidelines), have found it useful to group themselves together for some political and economic purposes or for tourism. Although each of these nations has its distinct and separate culture(s), the grouping is also useful in terms of cultural identity and world perception (MacRae 9). McRae observes, 'If South East Asia is now beginning to see itself as embodying some kind of cultural, political unity, it is largely as a reaction to Western, colonial perceptions….Now that economic factors have empowered the area it is no longer possible to recycle tired old concepts such as "post-colonial" or even "developing" to describe the cultural ferment South

East Asia embodies' (MacRae 10). McRae thinks also that English, traditionally considered to be the language of imperialism, has to be seen now as the link language. It has a transformative role to play now: 'more than just mere communication, more than just the necessary language of airlines and business, English can, ironically, become the language which will put South East Asia on the world map as a cultural presence' (MacRae 11). As the local strength of the local languages matures, so also must develop an awareness of the polyglot's strength of a language: 'English has always been a polyglot language, and polyglot culture, able like chameleon to adapt to an incorporate myriad influences in every corner of the globe' (MacRae 11). In view of this, English can be employed for 'good, world class translations' and translators, to bring local writings to a universal readership, should take up translation projects. McRay argues that the 'best and the most universal writing starts out as local' and that its 'universal frame of reference comes later. What unites readers and writers is the shared element of humanity enriched by the endless diversity of culture, setting and belief' (MacRae 14).

In spite of English having gained an advantageous position in respect of inter-cultural transactions, very few English language anthologies have been published so far. Quayum has edited a collection of stories entitled In Blue Silk Girdle: Stories from Malaysia (1998) and added a valuable introduction to it. Deepika Mukherjee, Kirpal Singh and Quayum co-edited The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Singapore and Malaysia (2002). The importance of contributions like Silverfish New Writing 6: New Writing from Malaysia, Singapore and Beyond (2006) edited by Dipika Mukherjee and S.E. Asia Writes Back! Contemporary Writings of the Pacific Rim (1993) cannot be overemphasized. All these further the understanding of the socio-cultural reality of the area. But the kind of anthology which goes a long way in creating an immediate impact on the people-to-people relationship is the type of collaborative anthology brought out by art historian Geeti Sen: Crossing Boundaries (1997).

That programmatic anthologies planned with the purpose of understanding and fostering regional inter-national fraternity can be very effective is exemplified by Sen's book. This volume includes contribution from three countries – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – and offers an update on cultural contacts between them. The anthology celebrates the fiftieth year of Indian independence by 'crossing the borders – to find common cause and shared experiences in identity with Pakistan and Bangladesh' (Sen 7). Sen puts emphasis on 'the sharing of identities' and

expresses hope that 'we can build upon new futures where India forfeits its role as the big brother…. But we have a long way to go before we can become once again, in vernacular English "same to same"' (Sen 8). The anthology looks at the history of the cultural subcontinent and argues that the cultural link, which sustains human relationships in the region, has a regenerative role to play. Below, in the last section, I willattempt to trace the recent history of theatre movement between the three countries that created a healthy attitude of human understanding. As Sen contends, to resist the growing fundamentalism and the attempt to combine religion and politics to create a new, false identity, 'theatre has engaged in the wider political movement to impart alternative messages' (Sen17). Madeeha Gauhar's article 'Crossing Frontiers: Shared Concerns in Alternative Theatre' which is one of the most important articles in Sen's volume gives us a detailed picture of the effort of the theatre group of the subcontinent to break down the limited vision of the politician. This will be discussed in some detail because theatre can be one field where interactions may take place effectively and which can spread to a wider area and therefore potentially create a pan-Asian fraternal space.

Gauhar's essay speaks of the success of a Pakistani theatre group called Ajoka which had braved the prohibitory environment in Pakistan during the martial law regime in order to realize its objectives. Theatre has never been encouraged in Pakistan and non-traditional theatre groups, which interacted with transnational ones, were looked upon with suspicion. Commenting on the role of secular theatre in Pakistan, Fawzia Afzal Khan observes that 'the ruling Islamist ideology of Pakistan, the state's very raison de'etre is intrinsically hostile to the fine and performing arts in general, and theatre in particular' (Khan 2). He has the following explanation to offer:

> This antipathy is because of the latter's [i.e. theatre's] potential to question all belief systems and because of the foregrounding of the body, upon which per formance is predicated – especially when it leads to an 'exposure' of the female body…. Thus it is combination of Islamist ideology, the vested interests of military and civilian (feudal) ruling elites, and profound anti-cultural bias of the Muslim middle class left behind in Pakistan after Partition, that has resulted in a contempt for dance and theatre, which are seen as 'borrowing' elements of 'Hindu' culture and life. This is especially so since one of the ideological imperatives of post-partition Pakistan was to carve out a cultural activity that was totally separate and distinct from India, and to insist on a denial of any shared common heritage (Khan 2).

Such an environment restrictive for smooth flow of cultural ideas is regressive in a rapidly globalizing world. Gauhar comments 'even today when the world has become a global village and the communications revolution is breaking all frontiers, the Pakistani establishment is still determined to blindly protect whatever it has defined as Pakistan's ideological and national interest' (Gauhar 251).

The specificity of historical background relating to the origin of neighbouring nations may therefore affect the growth of cultural understanding in a region, in this case involving three nations in South Asia, which were at one time parts of the same nation. The history of the birth and development of Ajoka Theatre testifies to this fact. I shall dwell a bit on Ajoka's activities, as described by Gauhar in the anthology mentioned above, because it appears to be indicative of what secular forces can achieve even in the face of surveillance by state agencies. Most noteworthy is its attempts to reach out to similar forces in the neighbouring countries for a consolidation of wider cultural understanding. In her essay, Gauhar – the lady behind Ajoka Theatre – brings out the dynamics of the activities of the state apparatus in Pakistan which operates to suppress 'deviant' cultural activities. Religious considerations play a large part in the determination of Pakistani state politics and state policies. The resulting attitude of politics of binarism and hate restricts, even prevents, literary and cultural exchanges. The fact that cultural activism by ordinary middle class citizens, many of them intellectuals, can overcome such 'politics of hate' speaks highly of their intellectual vitality and their conviction in freedom – the 'rights of man' – and the relevance of border crossing.

Ajoka's activities, I would suggest, may inspire emulation by other oganisations in other countries, as its agenda no doubt indicates a gesture towards possibilities of sharing a future based on interactive motives. Ajoka's activities across South Asia have been at two levels. It established and fostered personal contacts through workshops and festivals at the one level. At the other level, the involved persons worked together on each other's scripts or joint productions. Gauhar recounts:

> There was an attempt to institutionalise the interaction through the South Asian Theatre Committee (SATCO), established in Lahore in 1992 when the Asian Cultural Forum for Development (ACFOD) organised a South Asian Theatre Festival. This festival enabled Pakistani audiences and theatre workers to see theatre from Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Bagladesh, and also provided theatre activists to have interaction with the visiting actors/

> directors. SATCO decided to organise festivals in the region and facilitate contacts between theatre groups. (Gauhar 253)

Second and Third SATCO festivals took place in Dhaka in 1993 and Kathmandu in 1995, respectively. There were other occasions for sharing experiences with South Asian theatre activists, for example, the Centre for Policy Dialogue organised South Asian Dialogue in Dhaka in February 1997, where effective discussions took place between theatre activists and intellectuals. An interesting multi-national experiment for Ajoka was The Sixth River. The play, written by Shahid Nadeem of Ajoka Theatre and directed by Indian theatre director Anuradha Kapoor, had a multi-national cast that included Govind Singh Rawat of Sarwanam group from Nepal, and Vidya from India, the rest was from Ajoka itself. Gauhar says:

> The play's theme was communal harmony and it castigated the insane violence committed in the name of religion or nations. The play was performed in Urdu, Hindi and Nepali and effectively linked the spiritual and cultural bonds of the three countries and their religions. The play was performed at the People's Plan for the ('the' has to be deleted) Twenty First Century assembly in Bangkok. The collaborative production and heme of the play became more significant as the Babri Mosque demolition took place only a few days before the performance, and led to the destruction of mosques and temples all over South Asia. (Gauhar 255-256)

I should also mention Dukhini,a play about the trafficking of Bangladeshi women to Pakistan. It was also a collaborative project between Ajoka Theatre and the Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), a Chittagong-based group. Shahid Nadeem wrote the script, using research material collected in both countries. The play was directed by Sara Zakir of a Dhaka-based group called Nagorik. This project was particularly significant not only for transcending cultural and language barriers, but because of the history of relations between the two countries. Gauhar comments that the main challenge for the actors was to translate parts of the scripts into Bengali and to make the rest of it simple enough to be generally understandable for Bangladeshi and Pakistani audiences. It was necessary on the part of the Pakistani actors to learn a little Bengali and on the part of the Bangladeshi actors to learn some Urdu. Dukhini, moreover, was the first attempt to address the amnesia regarding the atrocities committed in the then East Pakistan during the Pakistani army action in 1971. The Pakistani actors were a bit nervous because of the memory of the carnage.

Before the play started on Shilpa Kala Academy Stage in Dhaka in 1993,

> one of us stepped forward and expressed our deep anguish at the crimes committed in the name of the Pakistani people. This was perhaps the first public apology to the Bangladeshi people by Pakistanis. Once this barrier was transcended, the barriers of language or culture were easy to cross….Now that we have worked together in bilingual collaborative production of Dukhini, we feel no river is unbridgeable'. (Gauhar 258)

Antidotes against 'Foreignness': Two Case Studies

The concept of 'foreignness' in the strict sense of the term is also responsible for a lack of understanding between peoples of different nations. There are literary works which deal with this aspect of the issue and suggest an angle of humanism which to a great extent creates a sense of fraternity. Such works need to be translated into English and included in anthologies. Here we shall dwell on two 'foreigners' – they are not permanent settlers in India – in two Indian short narratives written in regional languages – Rabindranath Tagore's 'Kabuliwala' written in Bengali and Mahadevi Verma's 'Chini Pheriwala' (second part of her book Smriti Rekhaon Me) written in Hindi.5 Both narratives were made into Bengali films – the first by Tapan Sinha (Kabuliwala, year: 1956) and the latter by Mrinal Sen (Neel Akasher Niche, year: 1959). The first story projects a 'Kabuliwala' – a man from Kabul in Afghanistan – as a prototypical father figure – while in the latter a man from China is presented as a brother figure. In both the stories the protagonists pine, vicariously, for kinship relationship with Indians, thereby ignoring the shadow lines that exist between peoples of two nations. The two narratives show that, despite popular misconceptions regarding 'foreign' characters, true understanding can be reached between human beings belonging to two cultures and nationalities, transcending class barriers in the process.

One problem in dealing with the 'other', generally involves certain amount of exoticization. He or she is made part of another, unfamiliar culture having no or negligible point(s) of intersection. In the relationship, a hierarchical order is established. In the stories discussed here, the unfamiliar 'foreign' protagonists are conceived of as universal. The narrators in both the stories therefore draw the alien characters closer through human compassion. Both the stories acknowledge linguistic-cultural gaps and admit of prevalent mistrust of and prejudice against these characters. Tagore accepts Kabuliwala's propensity to violence but in his story, through the strategy of authorial/narratorial distance from such misconceptions, an

attempt is made to dismiss the popular mistrust but at the same time he admits its existence. In Verma's story, there is a progress from initial stage of stereotyping to a gradual realization of the human traits of the Chinaman.

Rabindranath Tagore's short story 'Kabuliwala' written in Bengali is a first-person narrative. The narrator, an author by profession, describes how his five-year-old talkative daughter Mini befriended Rahmat who used to sell dry fruits, moving on foot from house to house in Calcutta. Rahmat who had left his own little daughter in Kabul grew very fond of Mini. His gift of dry fruits dispelled Mini's initial fears that his 'big bag' (jhuli) carried some abducted children in it. Mini's mother too had her own share of apprehension, which no amount of reasoning could allay:

> When I tried to laugh away her suspicion, she posed me some questions one after another, 'Has nobody's child been ever kidnapped? Is there no slave trade in the land of Kabul? Is it absolutely impossible for a hefty Kabul to carry away a child?'(Tagore 342; my trans)

However, despite the narrator's patriarchal intervention, Mini's intimacy with Rahmat continued. The conversation sessions between the young girl and the grown–up man usually revolved round some pet topics.

> …as soon as my daughter saw Rahmat, she would ask, laughing, 'Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala, what do you have in your hanging bag?'Rahmat would laugh and respond, unnecessarily adding a nasal tone, 'An elephant, of course'. (Tagore 341; my trans)

He would also talk about the inhospitable house of the in-laws about which Mini did not have the faintest idea and joked about how he would beat up the 'unknown animal' called sasur ('father-in-law') who, she must have assumed, might be in all probability a fearful figure. This innocent relationship was interrupted when Rahmat was imprisoned for stabbing a person, who lied about a loan he had taken from Rahmat. In his absence, Rahmat's memory began to fade from the mind of Mini and her family. Mini in the mean time grew up and her marriage was arranged. After a gap of eight years, Rahmat was released from jail and visited Mini's house on her wedding day. He perhaps had the impression that nothing had changed during his imprisonment and that Mini was still the little talkative girl. So he was shocked to hear that it would not be possible for him to meet Mini on that auspicious occasion. When the narrator wanted to pay for the gift of some grapes and raisin he had bought for Mini, Rahmat said,

> 'Listen, sir, as you have a daughter, so do I have one in my own country. I recall her face and bring some fruits for your daughter, I don't come here to sell the fruits'. Saying this he brought out of his big loose shirt a piece of an old, dirty paper from somewhere near his heart. He unfolded the paper very carefully and placed that on my table with both his hands. I saw the impression of a small hand on the paper. It is not a photograph, neither is it an oil painting, it is rather the impression of a sooty hand on the paper. Rahmat comes to Calcutta every year to sell dry fruits with this memento of his daughter kept in close proximity to his heart – as if the touch of the soft hand of the child spreads a heavenly bliss through his huge, pining heart. (Tagore 344; my trans)

The narrator, touched by his story, called Mini from the indoors. She appeared in her Bengali bridal dress. Rahmat failed to continue the old dialogue in the same old spirit. He realized that his daughter too must have grown up like Mini and that he would have to re-establish his old ties with her. The narrator felt that there was no difference between him and Rahmat and that Rahmat too was a father like him. He requested him to go back to his daughter. Curtailing the budget of the marriage ceremony, he offered some money to Rahmat for his trip back home.

Mahadevi Verma's 'Chini Pheriwala' too, like Tagore's 'Kabuliwala', is a first-person narrative about the female narrator's sisterly relationship with a Chinese pheriwala ('hawker') who visited India during the pre-independence period to sell Chinese-made silk wares. The story opens with the narrator's observation on the mysterious similarities in the appearances of all Chinese – they all look alike. They share identical physiological features like flat faces, small eyes, yellow complexion and so on. 'From the perspectives of their physiological shape, dresses and so on these people from a distant land appear to be just machine-driven dolls' (Verma 10; my trans.). It appears, therefore, that she in the beginning views the Chinese as 'others' as the emphasis appears to be on the 'difference' which makes them inscrutable. Her observations reflect, at the surface level, the bewilderment of the Indians at the exotic otherness of the Chinese, and the physiological difference often disrupts and defers attempts to know these 'others' and to enter into socio-cultural dialogue with them.

The narrator, however, soon shifts his attention to a particular Chinese and finds human qualities in him that dispels the sense of otherness. She met this Chinese in front of her house in Allahabad and she disliked his calling her memsahib ('translation of the term' in the sense of 'madam'

to show respect but the word also refers to a British woman, and has therefore a colonial connotation). This address sounded to her as non-Indian because Indian women are in the habit of being called 'mother', 'sister', 'daughter' and so on. Her irritation became evident when she refused to buy anything that was 'foreign' as she did not use foreign goods.

The word 'foreign' (Main bideshi – 'foreign' – nahi kharidte, meaning 'I don't buy things foreign') pained him infinitely as he wondered in astonishment, Ham foreign hain? Ham to China se aata hai ('Am I a foreigner? I have come from China'). She said, Nahi chahie bhai! ('I don't require anything, my brother!'). He was elated by the address bhai ('brother') and from that point onwards he began to consider her as his 'sister'.

The Chinese, however, missed the nuance of the word bhai ('brother') which is used even in neutral contexts, having nothing to do with any kinship relationship. Spurred by an emotional upsurge, he went on keeping contact with the narrator, told her of his past and the relationship erased the differentiating factors like the national identity.

Interestingly, the idea of 'foreignness' has been problematized here. Perhaps, as the story seems to suggest, all foreigners are not foreign. The narrator's objection to foreign goods was the nationalist outcome of her resistance to colonialist British subjugation, an aspect which has been forcefully brought out by Mrinal Sen's film version Neel Akasher Niche ('Under the Blue Sky') where the lady is made to address a public gathering that was later raided by the police. The Chinese, who would later go to China to join his own nationalist struggle against foreign subjugation helped her flee the police. At one level, therefore, these two persons (who may be regarded as the representative of their nations) collaborated against the 'foreigner', the colonialist-imperialist force, reaching an understanding against the subjugating forces.

At the level of the plot, Verma's story is a narrative of brother-sister relationship complicated by the implications of national differences of the characters. What is interesting here is that the 'foreigner' here, like that in 'Kabuliwala', pines for a vicarious kinship relationship as he saw in the narrator the reflection of his own sister, who was forcibly inducted in the flesh trade and was lost forever. As in Tagore's story, the narrator in 'Chini Pheriwala' helped the Chinese go back to China – to be reunited not with the loved one like a daughter, as in 'Kabuliwala', but to the nation itself which he regarded as 'the only centre of all affection'(Verma 18). In both the stories the emphasis is on the element of compassion and empathy which transcends narrow borderlines of nations and helps people meet

each other on humanitarian grounds.

The film adaptation of the story made some significant changes. The background is shifted from Allahabad to Calcutta. Even though the Chinese was a temporary migrant, he is placed in the Chattawalla Gully which is part of the location of the diasporic Chinese in Calcutta. As pointed out by Jawhar Sircar, the original Chinatown was in Central Calcutta – around Bentinck Street, Phears Lane and the adjoining part of Rabindra Sarani, which has been overtaken by a second one at Tangra in east Calcutta (Sircar 65). Chattawalla Gully is also part of the original Chinatown and it is the background of some of the stories about Calcutta Chinese in Kwai-yun Li's The Palm Leaf Fan and Other Stories (2006), a pioneering book in the sense that it is the first exclusive representation of the Chinese diasporic community in Calcutta. By placing the Chinese in this locality, Mrinal Sen, the director of this Bengali film Neel Akasher Niche, has undoubtedly given an artistic credibility to the story.

By introducing new characters which were not there in Verma's story – those of the narrator's husband and a servant – Mrinal Sen reinforces the element of resistance to a smooth process of bridging of differences. They stereotyped the Chinese by pointing out their perpetual untrustworthiness and their opium peddling careers. It is only through the lady's determined effort that all such hindrances were overcome and a healthy relationship between a sister and brother was established.

Conclusion

The above narratives offer us a roadmap to be followed for a closer understanding of other peoples across national borders. It has been argued earlier that it is through common man's efforts that a strong fraternal space can be carved. It is true that at the governmental level initiatives may be undertaken to build up platforms like ASEAN or SAARC but the benefits derived from such efforts must percolate to the popular level. A people's government can provide a friendly environment in which creative activities can be undertaken to bridge the gulf that may exist between nations. Cultural exchange programmes are a very good means for promoting better understanding of other cultures. That government funding can be utilized in an effective way is shown by Sahitya Akademi, the National Academy of Letters in India. It instituted, for instance, the Anand Coomaraswamy Fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi to promote research on Art, Culture, Literature, History and Social Sciences by Asian scholars. Azad N. Shamatov, Senake Bandarnyake, Chie Nakane and Mami Yamada are some of the recipients of this Fellowship. Through their lectures and

interactive sessions with writers and academics in India, the Fellows offer a picture of the literatures and cultures of their countries and take back with them a better knowledge of the country they visit. Mami Yamada, a Japanese writer who was a recipient of this Fellowship last year, for instance, in a lecture in New Delhi on 29 October 2007 elaborated an analogy between the Japanese and Indian deities. According to her, Japanese goddess Benzei Ten (ben means 'speech', zei means 'talent' and ten means 'deva' or 'goddess'), who is a goddess of music and war, holds, like her Indian counterpart Saraswati, goddess of learning and music, a musical instrument like the Indian veena which is known in Japanese as biwa (Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 25). Areas of commonalities can be discovered through explorations of such cultural analogies. This in its turn can minimize the chances of stereotyping the 'other' and pave the way for creation of a better relationship. Another effort of Sahitya Akademi, which created possibilities of sharing cultural products, may also be mentioned here. An Indian writers' delegation visited China in September 2007 on a Sahitya Akademi sponsored cultural exchange programme. The delegates discussed the similarities and differences between the two countries in terms of their linguistic landscape and China's cultural contacts with India and other neighbouring countries. They were informed that China imported many Indian serials and showed them with dubbings in Chinese which had become very popular. Indian writers of the past like Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand are still much respected figures. But there are not many translations of Indian English fiction writers – a fact that was recognized by the Chinese counterparts as a big gap. In a country like China, where English as a language does not yet have a popular base, works of translation is the best possible way for communication. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Shanghai Writers' Association and P.E.N. at Shanghai have been involved in considerable amount of work through exchange, particularly with immediate neighbours like Japan, and through translation programmes. In their meeting with the Indian delegates, the Association expressed its hope that 'translation traffic between Indian languages and Chinese would make our two cultures and literature come closer'(Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 9). The members of the Indian delegation asked questions related to, among others, the steps being taken to encourage translation of Chinese texts into other languages and about the circulation of journals and magazines. The Newsletter report goes:

> An important idea emerged from the discussion that the only ISO certified transliteration package for Chinese language was from Chinese characters into Roman, and that it was high time

> the Indian government thought of an authenticated and ISO-certified Devanagari transliteration system for its 230-odd speech sounds and combinations. This would greatly facilitate reproduction, writing and pronunciation of all Chinese names in their original form, as there are numerous distortions in these in both Indian print and mass media, and in the text-books as they come through English (Sahitya Akademi: Bi-monthly Newsletter 7).

It is through such cultural exchanges that we come to figure out areas of difficulties in the matter of understanding other cultures. Chances of not only mispronunciations but also misrepresentations can be minimized through implementations of the ideas and projects born out of such close interactions. This largely depends on the government funding.

We should take full advantage of such cultural exchange activities but the initiative should be taken to the grassroots level. We are not fully aware that in many Asian countries there already exist strong cultural ties that need to be reinvigorated. Ashutosh Bhattacharya in a book titled Sundari Indonesia ('Beautiful Indonesia') – published in 1976 but not much in circulation now – maintains that the vigour of Indian civilization that once spread to South East Asian countries is still to be found there. He went to Indonesia as a representative of the Government of India to attend a seminar organized there on the occasion of the first World Ramayana Festival in 1971. The book he wrote after coming back to India is a commentary on how close the South Asians and South East Asians are from the point of view of culture. Ramayana, the great Indian epic, is a significant link among these nations. The festival itself presented Ramayana dances performed by the dance troupes from different countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines and the like and in the process showed how strongly could this cultural aspect bind the people of this region together. He toured the countryside of Indonesia and observed Ramayana dances performed in the courtyards of village temples. So strong indeed is the Ramayana connection that a kind of 'Ramayana tourism' is being promoted now in a country like Sri Lanka. Differences of religion were no bar in assimilating the influence of this cultural aspect. It has indeed percolated into the common cultural life of the nations. This is what should be projected in achieving a focal point of commonality. The Asians are not mostly well aware of their common strength – their cultural ties that go into centuries and that had spread throughout a good part of the continent to be strengthened by the common mass. It is the political difference at the governmental levels that

clouds this aspect of the cultural commonalities among the nations. If Asia is to share a future, it has to initiate inter-national dialogues and build cultural platforms which will facilitate the process of coming together.

Notes:

1. This article was originally written, and submitted for publication, in 2008 as a chapter of a book to be edited and published by Ulrike Middendorf. The book never came out. The final shape of the article owes much to her useful suggestions and meticulous editing. I am immensely indebted to her.

2. Elaine H. Kim tells us how Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan novels and Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels contributed to the formation of contemporary American national attitude towards Asians. Rohmer's characters Dr. Fu Manchu is represented as having an inordinate lust for power. He is ready to use any means to achieve his goal of overthrowing the white race . The drugs invented by him ca transform white men into yellow people or corpses into zombies, who would blindly follow Fu Manchu's instructions.Similarly, Charlie Chan was also a very popular character in fictions and films. Kim catalogues the reasons for his popularity among the white Americans: (i) the humour of incongruity (an overweight Chinese occupying the unexpected position of a police inspector); (ii) humour of speech (pidgin and pseudo-confucian aphorisms); (iii) presence of mysterious and exotic chinatown; and (iv) public approval of a non-threatening , non-competitive, asexual ally of the white man. (See Kim 18). Parts of the information , ideas, and language used on this point is taken from my Ph.D thesis mentioned in the 'Work Cited' of this article.

3. The discussion on Asian American anthologies as a platform/ coalition has largely been taken from my doctoral thesis cited in the 'work cited.'

4. In Malaysia, for instance, emphasis on 'Bahasa Melayu' – renamed 'Bahasa Malaysia' after May 1969 riots – which became the lingua franca and the national language, affected the spread of English that had been in the nation for about two centuries. Mohammad A. Quayum explains the situation thus: 'First, in spite of its long historical presence, English is still considered an "alien" language in this part of the world, rooted neither in the soul nor in the soil. Second, because of its role in the colonial era when English was used as an instrument of oppression, nationalists often cast aspersions on the language and castigate those who write in it. They, albeit falsely and unfairly, accuse these writers of being cultural anomalies, looking

to the West for tutelage as well as audience' (Quayum, 1998, p. xii). Such emphasis on the indigenous language(s) is often found off and on in 'nationalist' rhetoric in India, but this is mainly political in nature. The popularity of English is on the rise, especially in recent years.

5. For this section, I have used ideas and language from an article I jointly published with my colleague Ananda Mohan Kar, Assistant Professor in Sociology, University of Burdwan. The article 'Identity of the "Foreigner"' was published in Wesleyan Journal of Research vol.1 (2008): 3-6. I am immensely indebted to Ananda Mohan Kar who contributed to the ideas contained in the above-mentioned article. The extracts quoted from the original Bengali and Hindi narratives are translated by me.

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