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Sandesh

A Newsletter from IndUS of Fox Valley

From Editors' Desk

We are happy to welcome the year 2006 with a wide variety of programming. The first issue for the New Year also brings contributions from four very talented women three lovely poems and a thoughtful essay

Due to escalating cost of printing and mailing we have adopted a new policy. Now on, there will be three issues of Sandesh per year (February, June and October). Next issue on Sandesh will be mailed to all our readers, electronically. Sandesh will be available at our website in Adobe format. A limited number of paper copies will be mailed only to those who specifically request for them. Besides saving costs, pictures will appear more vibrant. We are confident that you will continue to support Sandesh!

Sandesh

An IndUS Of Fox Valley
Publication

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Beyond Borders: Modern Literature of India

By Manjari Chatterji

You are Christmas shopping. You walk through the set of double doors of Barnes & Noble. You are assailed by the pleasant aroma of coffee, and on the front table displaying recent fiction, at least one colorful offering is from India. The cover will draw your eyes to familiar names and words: *Tamarind Mem*, *Darjeeling*, *Bangalore Stories*, *Arranged Marriage*, *Story -wallah* etc, and you are immediately drawn to them and recognize them as *one of ours*. But wait, before you pick one up and sit in one of those green chairs by the fireplace, when you say *Indian*, or *ours*, in that proprietary insider way, what exactly do you mean? You, meaning all of us, have created an imaginary construct, "India," that unifies a body of literature written by someone with a name that is Indian, but whose life may have little contact physically with the subcontinent. What do Rushdie, Vassanji, Roy, Kureishi, Seth, Mistry, Ondaatje or Ghosh have in common? Some were born in India, or Ceylon (not Sri Lanka), or the UK, and most write and publish in the UK, Canada or the US. Vassanji is from Africa, maybe three generations, but we never refer to him as Kenyan. Their publishers are International presses like Penguin, Vintage and Harper Collins. Well then, you say, what we mean is that they write *about India*: not really.

One of the very best novels *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (*Granta* has named her one of the twenty best British authors) for example is set in for example is set in immigrant *East End* in London. Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* is set in Egypt (and the Malabar coast), and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is set in Boston. Alright then, it is the characters, their values that mark them as

Indian, and whose lives are inscribed within a cultural geography that is beyond borders, are portable, are *hybrid* (to use a theoretical word from Homi Bhaba), or global, as indeed are we, the readers. And perhaps it is this that attracts our interest.

Ever since Salman Rushdie wittily described the phenomenon of postcolonial writing as "the empire writes back," scholars have been trying to label this writing: *Commonwealth writers*, *writers of fiction from India in English*,-- one clumsier than the next. Chinua Achebe, famous Nigerian author, hilariously described such a conference at Makerere U. and underscored the undesirability of labels. But there are some broad themes we can recognize. For example, some authors like Anita Rau Badami, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Devakaruni Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Kirchner and Monica Ali describe the immigrant experience, the struggles with identity, and with reconciling conflicting values. Some like Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Raj Kamal Jha, Suketu Mehta, or Amitav Ghosh set their stories in a specific locale: *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Calcutta Chromosome*, *Darjeeling* (but it's really mostly New York), *Maximum City* or Kerala. Some prefer their land of domicile: V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, or, simply a panoramic background as in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*.

Take Nobel Prize winner Naipaul as a really good example of what he himself

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calls, “the enigma of arrival” in terms of his British years, spent in almost full view, from his little cottage, of Stonehenge. The son of migrants from India, who went to Trinidad as indentured laborers, he left his Caribbean birthplace, at the earliest opportunity—a scholarship to Oxford—to study and write. From this new nerve center of his being (a painfully constructed and much-examined identity), he made forays of journalistic discovery to various parts of the world, including, of course, his ancestral home in Uttar Pradesh (he was very disappointed, and totally candid about it), and wrote about them in a mixture of cultural commentary, and political analysis.

From such unflattering titles as *Area of Darkness*, or *Million Mutinies Now*, one can guess Naipaul’s alienation from his “Indian-ness”—if such a thing exists. Yet, anyone who knows his first novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, will recognize a transplanted hindu subculture, minutely recreated in Trinidad’s Indian quarters with a fidelity and descriptive power, as well as a deep often-concealed affection for its follies, that is more profoundly evocative than any “desi” writer who works with Bombay, or Calcutta as a recognizable locale.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is Arundhati Roy’s Booker Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things*. This is set in Ayemennem, and Cochin, Kerala, in a society distinctly Indian with mango trees, pickle factories, Onam celebrations, Kathakali performances, and caste hierarchies, that rigidly separate the elite Syrian Christians from the untouchable paravans. Nevertheless, the heart of the novel is the clash of tradition and modernity, first brought by Syrian

Christianity, then British colonialism, Communism, and finally, American tourism. The novel describes an anglicized middle class family whose tastes run to Kipling, Mozart, Elvis and *The Sound of Music*, and whose children attend English medium schools that penalize them for speaking Malayalam, while the laboring working class and poor struggle with corrupt police, party politics, an unfinished revolution, and of course, caste.

Roy’s forte is foregrounding the painful contradictions of a globalizing society caught in the throes of rediscovering itself, after the interruptions of western political and economic power have created yet another accretion, or layer on the already complex composite that is India. The “West” impinges in insidious ways: the drug-addled Kathakali dancers who reluctantly shorten their performances to fit the tastes of sensation-seeking foreign tourists, the emancipated Christians who cling to medieval notions of caste, and the ancient “love laws” that officially recognize, but socially do not tolerate either divorce, or inter-caste marriage. While the robber barons of yester year cling to their privileges in the Yacht Clubs and five-star hotels, a nouveau riche of gulf-retained tradespeople are slowly challenging their supremacy. Those who cannot cope with this heady mix, migrate to the UK, to Canada or The States.

With the relentless flow of capital across borders, come the other inescapable cultural flows of ideas, values, and challenges of living in what Thomas Friedman calls a “flat world.” Those of you who can read Marathi, or Bengali or another Indian language may find this true of the powerful vernacular literature of India, as well, but the international nostalgia merchants are hard at work to keep you connected to

that imaginary homeland (a phrase used by Rushdie in a book of essays of that name) right here, whether in the visual or print medium. The proliferation of courses of study in University curricula attest to the importance of this growing body of writing. Several web sites also cover the best known fiction from India. More scholarly web pages are created by the Voice of the Shuttle, and Deepika Bahri’s pages at Emory University.

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WHAT WE ASK FROM SKY

By
Ellen Kort
Wisconsin's First Poet Laureate

I have watched a pair of eagles
make their nest above the Fox River
at Thousand Islands, watched them
fish the open water in winter,
the way they circle toward the sun
marking their feathered imprint
against the enduring sky,
touching everything with their eyes.

There is a place the eagle knows,
made of heart and bone and wind,
a faith in forest, swamp, and field,
the absoluteness of air.

We too can learn to trust our heart
like that, to palm the in-between spaces
where light drifts though a wall of pines,
where light follows the long white arms
of birch. We too can rise up and spread
our wings, starting new, mapping
the highway of the world, nourished
and surprised at how high we can fly.

A Special Note of Thanks!

In this issue of Sandesh we feature three poems and an essay, all meriting kudos. We are honored to publish What We Ask From Sky, a poem by Ellen Kort, the first Poet Laureate of Wisconsin. The poem Slant comes from Cathy Cofel, a published poet. When she is not writing poetry, Cathy works as Vice President of Community Foundation of Fox Cities Region. Sophia Majid penned The Image of Beauty and approaches her job as rehabilitation counselor with the sensitivity of a poet. Manjari Chatterji who teaches English at UW Oshkosh in her thought provoking essay discusses the challenges of labeling a disparate body of literature as "Indian". The Editors of Sandesh thankfully acknowledge these contributions. It is nice to be indulged!

SLANT

By *Cathryn Cofell*

We tell ourselves not everything is
poetry
as we run stop signs,
hold out hands for change,
scrub floors, down
on rough knees and rubbing.
But there in the moment, a glint
of ochre, a subtle shift of light.

Those of us who are poets
know to lean in and be mindful,
of the spin of mop water
on opposite sides of the equator,
of the scent of the dog in the dirt
we dragged in,
who licked his master's hand,
who strokes his beast and beats his
girl,
who worries her wounds
like the buttons of a familiar sweater
and craves this hunger growing
as we wait
and watch the next scene unfold.

While those of us who are not poets
know to rinse the dirty rag
and scrub harder,
to ignore the stench
and erase the tracks
we dragged in,
who we feel a shiver when we bend,
who reaches up
to turn the window closed,
who pulls the worn sweater
that much closer and tight.

It makes no difference how we bend.
In the end, we all get up,
we all stretch our stiff bodies,
we all rinse our buckets clean.
We all move on to the next moment,
not knowing something in us
has disappeared forever.

THE IMAGE OF BEAUTY

By *Sofia Majid*

Though I work in your world
and speak without an accent clinging,
do not mistake me for white.

Not now, not ever.

Please, do not force your image
of white beauty upon me.
For I won't embrace it.

And all you Indians who obsess
Oh wretched love with fairness.
Do not mistake me for white.

Not now, not ever.

For unlike you, I revel in this tone.
Glorious and golden.

Take notice of this woman
standing still against the storm
of critical glances, critical norms

This raven hair...do not bind!
But let unfurl
waves and waves of thickness and curl.

This nose
never to be a little, white button.
And this face...
unmistakably, undeniably Indian.

There is no mistaking this beauty for
white.

So please don't.



IndUS-2005 Celebrations: A Great Success!

IndUS-2005 was celebrated on Saturday, November 12, 2005 at Reeve Memorial Union, University of Wisconsin, and Oshkosh. The theme was: Health & Wellness: Perspectives from India.

The event featured a multimedia exhibition that introduced the guests to various health and wellness practices of India both in the ancient and modern context. On display were medical equipment invented by Indian inventors in Indian and the US, nutritional items, Indian cosmetics, Yoga demonstration, and presentations on innovative and alternative medical practices such as Ayurveda. The exhibition was sponsored by United Healthcare.



Manjari Chatterjee and Anu Varma explaining Indian herbal cosmetics to Fred Kile, a guest.

As per the tradition, the following individuals were recognized by inviting them to participate in the Lamplighting ceremony: Ms. Carol Busey, *Sharing Around the World Medical Project (Rotary), Appleton*; Dr. Jaya Jambunathan, *Oshkosh, Nursing; Professor and Founder, India Study Abroad Program*; Dr. Sujatha Kailas, MD, *Fond du Lac, Chief of Staff*,

St. Agnes Hospital, Member, Medical Examining Board; Dr. Kamaljit S. Paul MD, *Oshkosh, Neurosurgeon and Inventor*; Ms. Pam Witt Hillen, *TheDACare, Prevent Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth) Program*; and Mr. Rob Worth, *Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine*.

IndUS awarded four scholarships of \$ 500 each to following students enrolled at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, who undertook a successful study tour of India, in January 2006.



Tim Higgins, Chair, IndUS Board, presenting a check to Rayna Andrews.

Chef Peter D' Souza enthralled the guests with a delectable banquet, which was in part supported by TheDACare Inc. and Schneider National Inc.

Dr. John E. Mielke, MD, in his keynote address, stressed the need to seek balance among the physical, mental and spiritual aspects one's life.

The event ended with a cultural program that featured a dance-drama entitled "Transposed Heads". It featured dancers Meenakshi Ganesan and Lakshmi Ramaswamy from *Kalaanjali School of Dance and Music, Madison*;

Lisa Andrea Thurrell and Robert E. Cleary from *Kanopy Dance Company, Madison*; and Maya Abraham, Richa Mehrotra, Sangita Patel, Roopa Sale, Nimisha Sanghvi, and Nila Vaishnav from the Fox Valley. B. S. Sridhar who wrote the script also produced and directed dance-drama.



Dr. Mielke delivering his keynote address.

Aditee Shet and Mark Harris who served as the Masters of Ceremony for the evening ensured a smooth and pleasant conduct of events. Guests included Congressmen Tom Petri and Mark Green, several community leaders and friends of IndUS.



Opening Scene from Transposed Heads featuring dancers from Fox Valley



Lakshmy Ramaswamy, Meenakshi Ganesan and Robert Cleary in a scene from Transposed Heads.

Lunch & Learn: The Inaugural Session a Success!

Ms. Diane Doersch, a teacher at Horace Mann Middle School, Neenah and Ms. Ruth Mansukhani, Member, Neenah School Board and IndUS Board came up with a novel, bright idea called Lunch & Learn. The new program would invite representatives from various ethnic organizations to the school. Over lunch with teachers, there would be information exchange on cultural values, family dynamics, the role of education, parent and teacher expectations, and about the role of students, the process of learning etc.

The first session of Lunch & Learn was organized on Tuesday, January 17, 2006. In a Teachers' Lounge decorated with Indian artifacts and curios, approximately 30 teachers tasted Indian lunch and participated in three lively sessions of questions and answers. Among the participants was Dr. Wiswall, Superintendent of Neenah Joint Schools District. The program was very well received as reflected by two of the many favorable comments reproduced here. Asked about their favorite part, two teachers responded: "trying new food that I would never try otherwise and learning new things about a different culture"; "I enjoyed the informal atmosphere, yet the presentation was very enlightening and very informative".

IndUS thanks Ms. Diane Doersch and Ms. Ruth Mansukhani for their creative idea and taking lead to organize this event. Our thanks go out to Ms. Susan Kulkarni, Mr. Ishwar Mansukhani, Dr. B. S. Sridhar, and Ms. Ashi Tannan for their presentations and assistance.

IndUS Programs For 2006

IndUS has planned the following events for the year 2006. We solicit your continued support to make it yet another vibrant year. Save this for reference!

- ♣ *Martin Luther King Celebrations, January 16, 2006*
 - ♣ Toward Community on 6:30 PM, Lawrence University Memorial Chapel in Appleton.
 - ♣ The Oshkosh Human Relations Council, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, the City of Oshkosh, at 6:15 p.m.
- ♣ *IndUS Volunteer Dinner Saturday, February 25, 2006*
- ♣ *Fun With Cultures: A Day Camp for Children, Saturday, March 4, 2006, Location: Fox Cities Rotary Multi-Cultural Center and Appleton Public Library*
- ♣ *IndUS Annual General Body Meeting and Elections March 18, 2006*
- ♣ *Asia Awareness Month at UW Oshkosh, April 2006*
 - ♣ Kick-off Day: Music, Food and Dance Monday, April 3, 2006
 - ♣ Dance Recital featuring Kanopy Dance Theater and Kalaanjali Schools of Dance and Music, Madison, Saturday, April 15, 2006
 - ♣ Indian Movie, April 17, 2006 at 6:30 p.m. Reeve Union Theatre

♣ **Music Concert: Classical & Semi-Classical Music**

Friday, April 21, 2006
Rakesh Chaurasia (Flute)
Abhijit Pohankar (Keyboard)
Vijay Ghate (Tabla)

♣ *Neenah High School Diversity Fair, May, 19, 2006*

♣ *Midwest iChild Camp: Indian Heritage Day, June 29-July 2, 2006*

♣ *Foods of All Nations, September 16, 2006*

♣ *IndUS-2006, Saturday, October 28, 2006, at Liberty Hall, Kimberly*

Serve The Community!

IndUS volunteers serve lunch on Saturdays at Salvation Army, Appleton. They also help pack medical supplies for SAMP on last Tuesday of each month.

For further information call us at:
 920/749-4911 or e-mail at
indusfoxvalley@yahoo.com

India Association of Northeastern Wisconsin

Programs

- ♣ Children's Winter Outing: Bowling, Saturday, February 18, 2006, at Gary Sabre Lanes, Menasha, from 11:30 to 2:30 pm
- ♣ Adult Talent Show- India Nite, Saturday, May 13, 2006, at UW Fox Valley, Menasha, from 2 to 8 pm.
- ♣ Children's Movie Night, Saturday, June 17, 2006 at UW, Oshkosh

Annual Membership Dues

(Per calendar year)

Please select your preferred category of membership and place an "X" in the appropriate box.

- Individual Member \$ 10.00
 - Family Member \$ 20.00
 - Benefactor \$ 100.00 to \$ 499.00
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- Total \$

Please make your check payable to IndUS of Fox Valley and mail it to: IndUS, 3600 North Shawnee Avenue, Appleton, WI 54914.

Join the IndUS Team!

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
E-mail	
Would you like to volunteer?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes! Please contact me! <input type="checkbox"/> No. Not now.

Saturday
 October 28
 At Liberty Hall
 Kimberly

IndUS-2006

IndUS of Fox Valley
 3600 N. Shawnee Avenue
 Appleton WI 54914