

# BOOK REVIEW

## The Golden Gandhi Statue from America Early Stories

Subimal Misra  
Tr.By V.Ramaswamy  
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New Delhi.

### **Subimal : Aliterary bigot?**

At the very outset, I would like to concentrate upon the author's preface and commentary in the 'Golden Gandhi statue from America', a collection of stories of outstanding merit. The author subimal Mishra has been known for his anti-stories, his lances of derision and plain abuses more than his literary merit. 'A e Ajogar', the little magazine that was instrumental in letting subimal express, used to be studded with his anti-establishment opinions and queer visuals. Subimal has grown to be the face of subversion in the literary scene of Bengal. In the process, he outgrew his creation. This part of the article is inspired and incited by the author's ceaseless opposition, often just for the sake of it. It is bliss to come across an English translation of Subimal Mishra's work and before delving into other details let me accept that V.Ramaswamy does posses the linguistic skill to add some refinement to the 'directness' of the author without being oblivious of his mastery over literary montage and imagery.

Subimal's raillery is put to words unequivocally on more than one occasion. In the 'Preface: My sansness' the author writes, 'In the forty two years of my writing life, I have never allowed myself to print even a single letter in any daily or journal of any establishment.' We know it. His honesty to his cause remains unquestionable. But what is the cause for which an author has to push himself to complete isolation that is almost superhuman? If his prejudices are engendered by the hollowness of being in the modern

world, by the hypocrisy of the middle path then we must remind him that it was a poet of the elite who wrote, 'I have known the arms already, known them all) Arms that are braceleted and white and bare) But in the lamplight downed with light brown hair'. The author who has exploit the space provided by the establishment and converts the same into a platform of reaction certainly does not give in but casts a greater impact. In fact, in the commentary, the author is more direct about his stance, 'We must prick the syphilic sores of this class-divided, counterfeit civilization until liberation is achieved'. But what yours sincerely has often found strange is an anti establishment's optimism of bringing liberation through pieces of writing and, in the process, limiting themselves within the fences of estrangement. Subimal is composing a manifesto that resembles the Angries and Beats of the West and at the same time bears their lacunae. He goes ahead to declare, 'No serious writing in Bengali can be popular today'. We must not forget that written literature owes its origin to the educated upper stratum of the society and has so far been cursed to serve them. Yes, even subimal Mishra is read by the middle class alone. And by middle class, I do not mean a homogeneous whole. A literary critique, if oblivious of the author's existence, can do better justice to a creator as great as Subimal Misra.

### **Dr. Jekil and Mr. Hyde**

Thanks to the translator's choice, the stories compiled in the book are by far superior to some of the best stories ever written in Bengali language (even if we take Rabindranath Tagore, Banphul and Manik Bandopadhyay into consideration). Let us not read them in the light that the author himself casts on them. It is fine if we share his views, it is still better if we do not. I have already talked about the echo of the angry and the beat audible in the very core of Subimal's writings. Here I would try and explain the point. Subimal's characters renounce civility in its entirety. He invokes an animal who works as his chief muse. There is a Jimmy Porter<sup>1</sup> in each of his characters whose irascibility perturbs the reader to such an extent so as to tear their garbs of sanity into shreds. In the 'Naked Knife' the author portrays an intimate sensuous moment that immediately turns into a gory situation when Ghentu bites and tears

Mamata. But the moments are fluid. Mamata is found in his arms chewing cashewnuts in no time. Uncle seer saves and saves and rapes and then is bitten to death. He covets the one he addresses as his mother. A sinner or a savior? What should we call him? Creatures come out of Virgil's underworld- 'As there was no light, everything was hidden. In that obscurity they removed their masks and descended into the darkness, exposing their big teeth' (Feeling Distant). The author's 'planned violence' not only shocks, but sometimes even repulses the reader.

In fact there is a constant interplay of light (s) and shade(s). The Cartesian man of reason is dead. Here rules a Dr.Hyde who appears from the hidden world, from the inferno of human values. Yet he is known to us. He often overpowers the Mr.Jekils awaiting his girlfriend in a coffee shop, bringing her children to the school or writing a bookreview. It is altogether a different world where his characters come from. There is neither clemency nor asceticism. There is a coarse war with everything social and an animal Kingdom of desire, violence and instinct. It questions every philosophy and every language of social norms. But at the same time it certainly does not shun the existence of humanity and the possibility of redemption. Contrary to the author's claim, there remains a note of humanity in his voice when he writes, 'Somewhere far away, within the mist, the lamppost would be lit. Somewhere sacred texts will be recited, of Buddha, of Jesus, of Mohammed'.

### **A few more words**

The translator V. Ramaswamy deserves high applause for his wave translation. To translate an author as rarefied as Subimal Misra, one certainly needs a great deal of understanding not only of linguistic intricacies but also of the author's attitude towards the subject and the language he deploys. In the end, we must agree with Subimal when he says, 'I am... a different kind of writer'.

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