

## Deconstructing the Orthodox: C. P. Aboobacker in Conversation

Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal

C.P. Aboobacker began writing poetry from early childhood. A man of leftist leanings, Aboobacker has so far published twenty three books of which five are collections of poems, two are collections of essays and one a translation of Joop Bersee's poems. The crown of his poetic achievement is *The Old Earth*, a collection of his English poems, edited by Joneve Mc Cormick (Chief Editor of *Soul To Soul*) and published by Monsoon Editions in 2008. A member of the associations like Calicut University Syndicate and Progressive Writers' And Artists' Organization, Aboobacker was selected as the best poet of the week four times by Poetry Super Highway.com. His best poetry is, to borrow an expression from the great Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold, "the criticism of life". The poem 'The Corpses', published in *Kritya*, exhibits the dismal and gloomy scenario of the contemporary world: "Every corpse once had a life/ Once warm and loving, and hating". This lyrical expression is sure to touch the innermost chords of the reader's heart. Aboobacker appears to be in agreement with the great War poet, Wilfred Owen, notable for war poems like 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' and 'Strange Meeting'. Owen made clear the aims of his poetry in his celebrated 'Preface'. The famous statement of this leading poet of the First World War is: "Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity." Like Owen, Aboobacker too exhibits the naked horrors of the world in some of his poems. Despite this depiction of the miserable condition of life, Aboobacker is not a downright pessimist. The poems like 'Bridge' and 'Love Manifesto' reveal his faith in the survival of the human world, despite all the odds. In 'Love Manifesto', he optimistically declares: "There is a bounty beneath every human relation/ A bounty not the evils spirits can steal away /Time and space cannot destroy it /It is the fragrance of sighs..."

This senior academician from the state of Kerala is also the editor of the literary ezine, *thanalonline*, which has carved a niche for itself by promoting literary activities of both established and emerging authors and poets. The editorials, written by him for this 'flawless literary venture' display his penchant for social, political and literary criticism of the highest order. He is associated with a number of social and cultural groups of the state. This enlightened scholar, poet, translator and editor talks to Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal about the origin of poetry in him, editing of *thanalonline*, literary translations, mode of literary communication and contemporary literary scene of Kerala in a highly polemical interview. This interview, in progress for several months, was finalized at The Calicut Literary Festival, 2008.

*NKA:* As editor of the online bilingual literary magazine, *Thanalonline*, what do you think, is the current status of creative writing in India?

*CPA:* My jurisdiction is not India as editor of [www.thanalonline.com](http://www.thanalonline.com). It is the whole world. I find poetry is widely read and for this vast reading, new poems are composed by talented writers. Each poem I receive is different. Indian poets are generally averse to electronic publishing. This is not a generalization; Dr. Rati Saxena, one of the great poets modern India has produced, publishes her poems mainly in electronic media. She deals with love, womanhood, time, and what not. Every line is carefully written, every line is impregnated with a passion not seen elsewhere. Her mountains, Udaipur Lake and many other poems such as sea poems etc. give reader a pleasure veiled by a smooth sorrow. But we know while reading she is writing from the depths of sorrow. But she is different from other writers. There are other Indian writers-- Anna Warne is there:

I am held captive /I cannot contain this flow/ This boundlessness  
Overwhelms me Drowning me in love.

Or writing from the eternal background of fear of war or war itself, Farideh Hassan Zadeh is there:

Like the bloody sound of alarms, /Like the roaring anti-aircraft rounds, /  
Like the falling bombs and rockets, /which turn the ruins and ashes into  
eternal reality; /I feel night by night more real and old.

How could life be a beautifully knit web for a mother who lost her child in war? And there are many more poets; only thing is that I cannot limit them to the borders of a country. In "A silly fish poem", Fide Erken from Turkey writes: "You don't care about life's troubles,/ However, I don't want to be in your place./ Do you know the poet, Fide, here?/ No she doesn't hold any importance to you. /I wish I hadn't known her either. But it happened once, twice, a million times..."

Poets these days are like this; they don't want to be very important, they just want to say what they want to. Poets want to reveal to the world that men and women live, although in suffering, although betwixt war and terror. Kate Bernadette Benedict writes:

By this walking we know we live.  
Do our bowed heads still venerate?

We cannot say; nor do we speak of bleeding or any particular lack.

It is existence. Man does exist. In calamities as well as in atrocities; in wars; as settled ones or as refugees, man does exist. The poet tries to picture the perseverance of mankind. They go back to Rumi, again they attempt at the universal fusion, just as Kazim Ali from Iran does. Rumi was not rotating round the sun (Shams) he discovered at the streets, but the sun within himself; the poets of today know it. One day Shams went out of the reach of Rumi and never returned; Rumi began his search and only in the very last he found out the sun within. Poets are like that; they reach the truth ultimately, after ages of bleeding,

after epochs of searching. The desires and visions of modern poet are different. They are ready to suffer for the world, or along with the world, as they know the world is full of suffering just as Buddha had realized it two and a half millennia ago.

I want to build a monument  
To the farmer who drove his tractor into the fountain  
You say as we walk past.

Melissa Tuckey is merely translating this feeling in to modern language. Jan Theuninck from Belgium, who also paints a lot, writes about human destiny: "Like a shrine/ You lie / In the middle / Of the wood/ And warn / Of those/ Who preach peace/ And make war" . The modern hypocrisy of statecraft cannot be better described and more concisely written.

I need not expand my answer anymore. It is a self evident truth that poetry does cover all senses and all sensibilities.

**NKA:** What is your primary criterion in the selection of a work of art?

**CPA:** My criterion? The only criterion is that a creation must have an appeal on me. I put myself in the place of a reader with no skill, with no awareness of what is strong or weak in a poem or work of art. If, then, the work of art appeals me, I publish it. Very often my learned friends have asked me why I have published X or Y. This is the answer. It appeals to my sense of aesthetics, which is a commonplace phenomenon.

**NKA:** Any special reason for choosing the title *Thanalonline* for your ezine? Please explicate the significance of this title in the contemporary world ethos, marred by blood-dimmed tide of violence and nasty bestial approach of the fellow human beings.

**CPA:** Thanal means shade in Malayalam. I chose this name for my residence also. Perhaps because I never have had the luck of experiencing it from anywhere, any place or any individual or group, either within the family or within my closet of friends. I have not had the experience of a peaceful life within my society. Strife prevails everywhere. I don't complain that it is anything new; it has been, it is and it will be the same. Man is pushed to very hot circumstances and told that it is warmth. Man is pushed to very cold climes and told that it is cool and calm. It is not a truth. Media everywhere give him/her only the most barbaric of emotions. Channels pollute him with over-hot or icy emotions. Thanal is a shade where you can stay for any length of time. It is neither too cool nor too hot. But it is not an emotionless region. It deals with love. It deals with hate. It also deals with salt and food.

**NKA:** Despite your being an ex Professor of History, you have launched a literary ezine. What factors –external and internal –prompted you to indulge in this venture? How has your long academic sojourn over the years helped you in

your role as editor of *Thanalonline*? Can one find the imprint of a teacher's psyche in your journal?

**CPA:** I don't think so. History, for me, was a choice of circumstances. I wanted to learn literature. Poverty and inability to go to distant colleges led me to learning history. Literature has always been my love. I have been writing poetry for the last fifty plus years. It is upto the readers and viewers to decide whether there is imprint of an experienced teacher in my ezine. I am not pedagogical. Still, I hold that I was a good teacher. This was mainly because of my love for poetry. And Dr. Nilanshu, do you find a teacher's psyche in *thanalonline*? Teaching is not just telling or lecturing something, I presume. It is love, it is communicating; communication is not possible without a strong bond; may be love, may be hatred. I have so far not been able to communicate with my spouse. She is a different cast. For her I am different cast. I don't mean pedagogy. I mean communication. We have been living together with some attraction to each other for the last thirty five years. So, existence without communication is possible. Why, then, should I teach anyone? I communicated with my students; they communicated with me. My audience is always a broader world.

**NKA:** What is the source of poetic inspiration in you? How does a poem emerge in you? Please make an emotional statement.

**CPA:** In fact I don't know. I write on political matters. Yes, I write political poetry. But I am particular that they should not be slogans. One can write slogans as slogans, not as poetry. I write about love, not love making. I write about nature, but not about farming or rock-cracking. I can write about farming, but not about good seed or bad seed. I am not bothered about the harvest; I just sow the seeds. Sowing is more important. I don't know how a poem sprinkles in me; it just happens; it begins as restlessness. I wrote all my poems when I was restless. This restlessness is the bliss at which my poems were born. I cannot name a particular thing as a source of inspiration; it might range from conjugal love or lost love; it might range from hunger to birth of the first man. I have more than a thousand poems in my exchequer of poetry.

**NKA:** In your poetry, you seem to emphasize the fact that happiness and pain are the two sides of the same coin in one's life. In 'Love Manifesto', we have the deep philosophical expression:

Sun rises and sets the same moment  
And your morn to me is the beginning of a sleep  
World is always sleeping and waking up

...

My nightmare is daydream to you,  
My moonlight is hot sun to you.

The above-mentioned lyrical lines appear to have an echo of Shakespeare's expression in *As You Like It*:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head...

What will you say about this? What are the other possible sources of such philosophical musings in your poetry?

*CPA:* I don't think there is that much philosophical strains in the poetry referred to. Man always wakes up, always sleeps; why did I write it? It must be the impression of the normal astronomical phenomenon that earth is revolving round the sun. Poetry, I feel is really the creation of the reader. Poet sees and says ; reader sees deep and explains. I was perhaps supposing a communication with a person who was just opposite to my part of the earth. It would be night for him/her if it was day for me. Like this every part of the earth is different in time, in spite of our standard time zones. Nature is such that it is always vigilant and it is always dreamy; I am afraid that that dragging my lines to Shakespeare's range would be a little arbitrary. Let us put a poet where he is, not upon the heights he cannot claim to reach.

*NKA:* What is the significance of symbols in your poetry? For example in the poem 'The Bridge', mark the following lines:

A bridge can connect all creatures,  
Not merely two humans.

Besides, there are several other symbols in your poems. Do you give more importance to these symbols than to the direct communication? Some scholars believe that poetry should be simple, direct and without any symbols and ornamental flourishes. Whereas another group is of the view that the poet should indulge in the indirect communication of his ideals through symbols and myths. Where should we place Aboobacker as a poet? Is he a man of simple poetry or a poet of complex symbols? Or, is he a combination of both?

*CPA:* Poetry, to me , is an utterance of my soul. You may like it or not, it is the fact. Whatever, I cannot state through any other means of communication comes the poetry way. It can be a direct statement; it can be through images. It is in fact not symbol; it is an image; imagery is the language of poetry. The so-called direct poets also use images in plenty. Images are used not to complicate things and confuse the reader; they are used to simplify things, make things clear. But there is a contradiction between poetry and readers, rather between poet and what he/she has to communicate. He wishes to simplify things as clear as possible; he is not satisfied; so he uses images. It is a contradiction between poetry and simplicity. So, when the poet uses images, the like-minded reader gets to it fast. Yeah, there is one always there. It is like a love affair. But the like-minded reader knows it, he gets it, he develops the unrest on reading it. So, I am neither easy to read nor difficult to read; my poetry is neither simple nor complex; it is the reader who decides the fate of my poetry. And I say emphatically that it is not a critic who decides the destiny of my poetry. They can

make and unmake poets for some time; but they cannot destroy poetry in anyone. But there is no reader when the poem is conceived or written; only poet and what he has to say; only images. Myths are part of culture. It is the hidden reality. Like poetry, you have to realize the meaning of the images within the myths.

*NKA:* The poems like 'The Corpses' and 'Look at the Star' are marked by naked realism. The imagery of the poems brings out the chaotic havoc of the modern civilization. I am quoting some lines from both the poems:

Every corpse once had a life  
Once warm and loving, and hating too. (The Corpses)

Comely girl dead  
Handsome boy shattered  
Cupids shy away  
Stars blink. ('Look at the Stars')

What parallels do you find in world literature of such depiction of the contemporary reality?

*CPA:* Oh, dear I am not a scholar. I have read a few poems; I try to read others. But when I write, I damn don't think about other poems and poets. I am not a critic. I in fact despise them. They suck the blood of poets; dead and gone. The established poets do not want their praises. But they persist and write on them, not for the sake of poetry, but for advertising themselves that they are there to make poets. I pity them. No, I don't want to deviate. Critics will be of great use if they begin to say that here is a new poet and he might be read. "Corpses" is in fact enthused by a description of post mortem by a doctor. It wishes to convey that every man would die and has had dreams and wishes, even if he were an Emperor. Life has an end; fulfill the end. You are to lie somewhere like a corpse. "Look at the star" is looking at the earth and life in it. Star is the path finder. It showed us the way to where Lord the Jesus was born. It must show us the way to understand what the world is upto. And for parallels, I don't think there is any parallel to these poems. They are their own; they are composed as themselves.

*NKA:* I feel that beneath this depiction of the stark reality of the surrounding world, there is utter pain in your heart. What is the way out of this anarchy for the doomed civilization?

*CPA:* You be a poet; then you are doomed to be melancholy. It must be the basic nature of politicians, too. Melancholy is essentially incommunicable. You reign supreme in the realm of your melancholia. Well and good. How do you resolve it? You can sit idle and weep. Or you can sing aloud and calling upon the like-minded to shed away the anarchy, infamy and evils of the world you are pushed into. By being remaining melancholy, you tend to become and idle and aged prematurely. You should not succumb to lethargy and inactivity. It is a great war within your self. A poetic mind can never be idle and aged. Poets are the law

makers. I overcome my pains with my poetry, and my poetry is a struggle. Some ignoramus might think, what is there in this writing a few lines to fight for? Long live the ignoramus!

*NKA:* What is the significance of the nature imagery in a poem like 'The Old Earth'? Do you find any association between man and nature?

*CPA:* I hope these lines from the poem will give you an answer to your question:  
On the slopes of mountains/ Gasp of chasing dogs/ Die away to distances/  
Singular rain embraces the earth/ Good looking Earth satiates/ Monstrous  
desires hidden in caves/ Continents and oceans/ Deltas and islands/ Rivers and  
lakes/ Gorges and deserts/ Embrace each other, entwined and curled/ Bring out  
the lust of earth./ This enchantress is unable to keep secrets/ They flow as if in a  
blue film.

Earth is the abode of man. He has been wolf and victim. He has been love and hate. And man is the only creature that drills into his own abode.

But man drills holes in the earth/ In search of diamonds and petrol/ Made of solar power/

It's human rapine, sores and scabies/ Contracted from illicit connections/ Burst and flow/

Still this old woman waits for her lovers.

*NKA:* In such poems as 'Writing' and 'Nature of Poet', you discuss the act of poetic creation:

It is a gift from the depths

It is a sob rising from heart burns

On awareness of hunger! ('Writing')

The poem 'Poet' calls him 'an enigma to all'. Will you like to share some ideas of those two poems with the readers of this interview?

*CPA:* In their peripheries these poems seem to be very subjective. These poems deal with things finite and infinite within the poet. Psyche of a poet is a realm in itself. It is inhabited by subjective and objective realizations. Objective realizations can be easily transmitted; subjective realizations cannot be. The first is visible to all, but the next is not. That is why it is next. Objective realizations are finite and subjective ones are infinite. The quoted lines from "Writing" have both the parts, infinite and finite: " It is a gift from the depths/ it is a sob rising from the heart burns", is the infinite part. It is subjective. But when I wrote " awareness of hunger" , I knew it was transmitting the same feeling of objective reality you get from "Slaves Dream" or Oliver Twist. For the same reason, poet is always an enigma. Neruda wrote mostly on love and history; he is read so, but at the same time workers and peasants also have very fine streams there to drink from. Poet combines the objective and subjective, finite and infinite, material and spiritual.

*NKA:* Several of your poems have completely modern imagery. For instance, we may see the following lines from 'Remembering Me':

Now in this present  
I lie alone, covered by chits of prescriptions  
Like an AIDS infected syringe.

These lines remind the readers of Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.  
Mark the following expression from Eliot's poem:

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table...

Eliot justified this mingling of the opposites in his essay 'The Metaphysical Poet'. While justifying the comparison between exceedingly diverse things, Eliot wrote, "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences." In a way, the just-mentioned essay is a justification of his poetic technique. Will you also like to justify/ validate the use of such imagery in your poetry?

**CPA:** I think my answer to this question is tacit in my last answer. What I have to add on the basis of your question is: I also live in the century when Eliot lived. War and carnage are increasing in unforeseen dimensions. New diseases are emerging. My question is just simple: people of Iraq fight and die for their country; why should the young ones from the USA fight and die in Iraq? If you are able to answer this question, you will get the answer to all questions of poetry in present day world. Let alone, the economic, political and cultural crisis that is haunting mankind.

**NKA:** Do you prefer writing literature in your mother tongue or in an alien language (English)?

**CPA:** I can write both in English and Malayalam. I realized it only recently. But very often the one I write in Malayalam is not easy to translate into English for me, and vice versa. But I must admit that I prefer to write in Malayalam as it is my mother tongue. I don't think man thinks in a language. Man thinks or imagines in ideas or materials. But I have seen many people feeling that they are thinking in one language and therefore it is very difficult for them to put their thoughts in another language. It is ignorance. Is language that important for the poet? There are a great many schools that argue all about poetry is language. Words, they say, are the philosophy, verses are the harvest; I don't think it is very important. In the most poetic moments I have neither words nor verses. I have my fill of restlessness. Language comes only secondary. English or Malayalam, poetry is the primary thing; and, here also, poetry is preceded by the life lived, nature sighted, dreams hallucinated- in short poetry precedes language, but poetry is preceded by life. Language is a tool; it is not the soul.

**NKA:** What should be done to promote regional/ vernacular literatures?

**CPA:** I don't know. I am not a linguist. I feel in Indian languages vocabulary should be exchangeable. Many are indeed exchangeable to day. For this one has



to see the words common in all languages first; then one has to discover the synonyms used in every language which has a similarity to the one in another language. First of all, I give the following example: Amma. It means mother. Almost all the Indian languages use a similar word for Amma. Next I give the following example: sirassu. It means the head. It must have a Sanskrit origin. In Hindi I assume it is "sir". Malayalam word for it is Thala. But when students are given synonyms for Sirassu, the word Seersham is used. These and like-words could be codified. A language flourishes when it is easy to use and when it has a good vocabulary to express all human relations, all nature and universe, all emotions and thoughts as well. For example even English has no equivalents for certain local language words: Malayalam has a word Aangala. It means brother in relation to sister. Madhavi can have an Aangala, but Madhavan cannot have. Its opposite gender is Pengal, sister in relation to brother. Ammavan is the brother of the mother and Ilayachan is the younger brother of the father. In English there are only brother, sister, and uncle. This is an asset of regional languages.

**NKA:** Are you planning a translation of your Malayalam writings into English? What do you think are the salient features of a good literary translation?

**CPA:** I am not always successful in translating my works into English. I can write in English. Most of my translations are from English to Malayalam. I have translated nearly 15 books from English to Malayalam. Now I am engaged in translating the famous book on Indian History *The Wonder that was India* by A. L. Basham. I have translated Irfan Habib, Osho and many others. *The Wonder* is a challenge. My greatest challenge was the translation of sixty poems by Joop Bersee of South Africa. It is a wonderful work of translation. I don't know whether the academic world admits this. If they do not, it is their loss. And about translation: How do you translate? You translate a book after fully understanding a book. You must be fully aware of the text. Otherwise you would not have continuity of the standard. Then, you will have to decide that no damage to the original text should be made. How? To forget the exact words in the original words; only remember the concept in the paragraph; then you write in your own words. There are many schools of translation that think the original book could be interpreted in a translation. It will be a guide, not a translation! You have no such rights as interpreting. We have to adhere to the text. You can use techniques that will help you infect the concepts in the original in your language.

Some of my works are translated into English. I have collected them in a book: *The Old Earth*. But all poems in *The Old Earth* are not originally in Malayalam. But I failed in translating many works. I wanted to do my poem Anandaram( And After) or Bhoomiyude Kannu( Eye of the earth) or Katal( The sea), or Unmadathinteyum Swasthyathinteyum ezhu raathriakal( seven nights of madness and calm ) etc. Unfortunately I could not translate them.

*NKA:* Contemporary society is terrorized by the shameless mockery of human values on all sides. Can literature fill this vacuum?

*CPA:* I see this in two perspectives: 1. Many incidents show that there is a mockery of human values. 2. Mockery of human values is brought to human notice by the growth of media. Let us explain the first. We have been discussing it. People everywhere complain of mockery of values. It happens. There are several reasons. Man expects much; but he gets very least. This is the main reason. And who pollutes our values? The so-called messengers and worthies of good are doing it! Channels have a role. USA is exporting its sex empire to the vast millions in the third world countries. Channels and cinema always try to incite people to violate all values. Crime is glorified. Anti-heroes win. It is Asoka the great that won; he was the aggressor, and the king of Kalinga is nowhere. Why? He failed; he was the leader of the vanquished. USA is dictating, not Iraq; aggressors and the victors dictate values; man is not an ignoramus to respect dictations. Recently Russia attacked some place in Georgia; USA was the first to question it in the name of international values! It is not mockery of values; it is the mockery of the mockery of the values. It is there. Now we find a young lover clasping the hands of his spouse and complain: Oh, these youngsters! How dare them! Our rulers are ready to sell out our country to USA disregarding the fact that we have thorium, which can be cultivated to uranium233. Time and again, our rulers say that buying nuclear fuel would solve the problem of energy; they conceal the most obvious facts before the students of nuclear physics! Could we expect the youngsters to be esteeming the values the elders made for them? On the one side, rulers sell the country; on the other side a love affair is dubbed as disregard of values. Which is what?

Secondly, I must confess that this complaint has always been there. I remember, some fifty years ago, my parents used to complain that values are disregarded by my generation. I was one among the value-breakers. I cropped my hair to an immoral length. Calvinists had punished women for arranging their hair to an immoral height; they have prescribed punishment for children for beating the parents. Not gown up children! Just children! The harems of the monarchs of the old world would not bring them any punishment. It was the desire of a king, Henry VIII that led to the English reformation! The feudal families and their manors had collected the best available women for the use of Lords of the manors. And they dictated the values. Fagin ran his school of pick-pocketing before the eyes of the authorities. Fagin might be a character; but the author of *Oliver Twist* got it from the society he was living in. Cervantes got Quixote from his society. Akbar the great could love and marry whoever he wanted to. Dushyantha could love Sakunthala to make her one among his co-queens, (we can't call them concubines because they belong to a king). In short the whole history is controlled by breaking values. Breaking of the values is

nothing new to history. Vice today could become a virtue of tomorrow. And vice versa.

*NKA:* What difference do you find between e-publishing and orthodox publishing? Can the former be a proper alternative for the later? You ideas, please.

*CPA:* E-publishing, as I do it, has no difference from orthodox publishing. But the possibilities of the former are various and varied. There are sites that could be instantly uploaded. There are blogs and friendship sites, where you could publish yourself. E-publishing is very fast and up to date. You get the latest works of art and latest information on any branch of knowledge. You could even write a book on any topic in which you are a novice. This would gradually imperil the depth of the knowledge. But you can't escape the advantages it provides. Human venture is belittled, too. You have an outline of any knowledge in the net. Meditation and effort in gathering knowledge are ignored. The great many obituaries that appear on the death of a poet or scientist from writers who are not well-versed with the works of the deceased are a consequence. People are provided with only shallow information. I, for instance, am for orthodox publishing. It remains before your eyes and in your hearts. But it is very much limited to well-known writers and scholars. The blogs that appear today give us a new light on the parallel stream of literature; without blogs, we would have missed it. I have myself introduced a number of new writers. They are good ones. On very few occasions, the ezines are forced to publish some lower level works. But it happens in print media too. But e-publishing must be encouraged while we retain orthodox publishing. Orthodox publishing also depends highly on digital graphics and images, digital printing etc. Technology enhances and strengthens human endeavor.

*NKA:* What will you say about author-publisher relationship in India? What are the major problems, faced by the authors, poets, editors and scholars in getting their works published? Some publishers even demand money from the authors, what to say of royalty. The publishers do not promote new and emerging authors. What do you want say, Sir, about all this?

*CPA:* I don't like to comment on this. It is very deplorable. The publishers have their own coteries. They are given much coverage and exposure. Even in periodicals I write in, they like to print the books of those who mainly do not write in them. When I put a request, their question is: will it sell? You can sit well assured that the books that go unpublished, most of them, would sell more than the ones that were published. People's tastes and desires are artificially moulded. If the readers do not get the works of a writer, how will they know there are other writers? A terrible black out is going on. Writers are at the mercy of publishing capitalism. Of course, Mahasweta Devi and M. T. Vasudevan Nair would sell and get published. But lesser writers would be ignored; it is here that e-publishing has a place of importance.

**NKA:** Tell something about contemporary literary scene in Kerala. Who are the other major literary figures writing both in Malayalam and English?

**CPA:** As far as I know, very few are there. K. Satchidanandan is there. T. P. Rajeevan is there, Anitha Thampi is there. Sangeetha is there. And a few others also write bilingually. I am one among them. I don't claim to be equal to them. I write, that is all. I say this not as mockery, I don't like to mock at any writer.

And contemporary literary scene in Kerala is very productive. There is a great output; I don't know how much the input was. I also don't believe that all books published by established publishing houses are that much worthy. But there are trends; there are trend setters, too. In Kerala every oven would cook any meal. They write one thing; I get a different meaning; text is not a concern of regard; reading is the concern. There are a few writers who insist upon texts. I don't want to name anyone.

**NKA:** What is the role of *Kerala Language Institute* in the promotion of literary activities in Kerala?

**CPA:** Language institute was and is promoting instructive and informational knowledge. In the beginning, it tried to promote a Malayalam glossary. Some words were accepted, some were unacceptable: for ordinary switch the Malayalam word given in glossary was: vidyuchhakti-gamana-agamana-niyinthrana-yanthram( a machine controlling the coming and going of electricity). It was a farce of a language, a gimmick. But gradually the Institute has changed. From last year on, The International Bookfest Calicut is organized. It can encourage young scholars who can write books to publish their books. Authors like me were translating books without any training. Now the institute is imparting District wise training in translation. Not that all who attend would become good translators; but experiences are shared. And Dr. P.K.Pokker, the Director at present is a philosopher and scholar and a critic of repute. Under him, the institute is sure to make gains.

**NKA:** Your future writing plans?

**CPA:** I have a great many plans. I wish to write one or two novels. I have been on them for the last many years. I feel that most of what I have in mind does not open up in my writing. Still, I have been writing for the last fifty years. It was in 1959 that I translated 'The Slave's Dream' of Long Fellow. I also translated William Blake's 'Night'; it is a poem that has influenced me greatly. I also translated Coleridge's 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner'. It was not a good translation. I did it when I was doing my undergraduate course in History. I have no publisher. My main sphere is poetry. Without poetry, I have no life, no love. Poetry and politics are my main preoccupations. I am in the left movement. I was a member in the national Preparatory committee that founded the Students Federation of India. I had contested an election in 1970 before I came into Govt

service. I lost beautifully. Then like the Duke of Winsor I abdicated my political position. You know why the Duke of Winsor abdicated his throne. It is a pleasure to view things in the view point of the Duke. Unfortunately I lost my Empire and also the cause for which I abdicated. I don't harbor any sorrow on my decision. It was my personal decision.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The interviewer Dr. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal is Senior Lecturer in English at Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareilly, (U.P.), India. He has his doctorate on T.S. Eliot from Allahabad University.

Dr. Agarwal is interested mostly in Indian Aesthetics, Diaspora and Contemporary Critical Theory. His interviews with a number of contemporary literary figures, as well as his research papers, book reviews, articles and poems have appeared in publications, including *The Vedic Path*, *Quest*, *The Confluence*, *Kafla Intercontinental*, *Pegasus*, *IJOWLAC*, *The Journal*, *Promise*, *The Raven Chronicles*, *Yellow Bat Review*, *Poetcrit*, *Carved in Sand*, *Turning the Tide*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Bridge-in-Making*, *Katha kshetre Hyphen* and *South Asian Review*. Several anthologies have selected his poems and articles. His poem "To Lord Krishna" is in the celebrated anthology, *The Pagan's Muse*, Citadel Press. Several of his literary pieces have been included in *The People's Poet: Summer Community Magazine* of 2004 and are posted on websites. He has also edited a critical book on Stephen Gill, which is to be published shortly.

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