

# Borderless Spirit

Stories that resuscitate voices enfeebled by the Raj and Partition

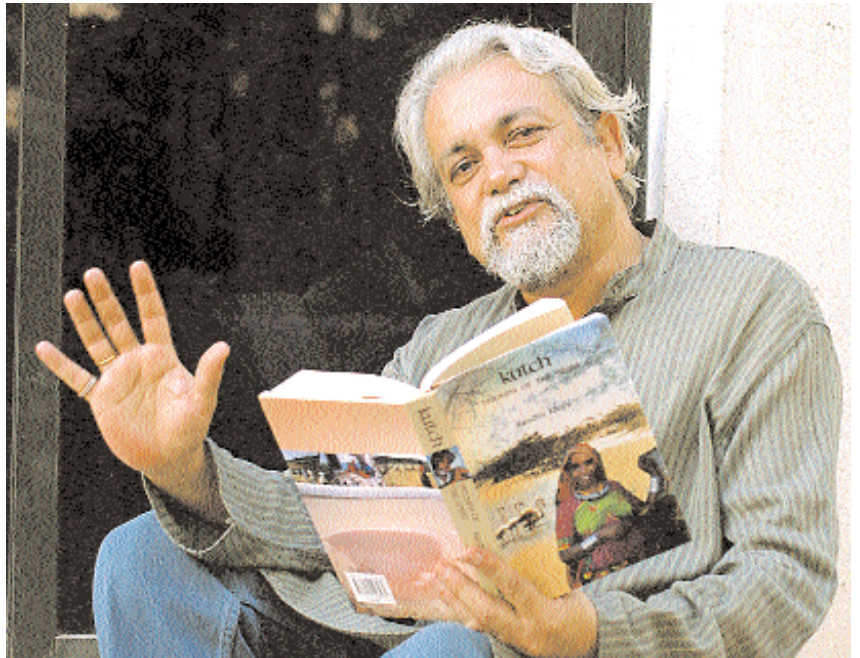


A LETTER FROM INDIA:  
CONTEMPORARY SHORT  
STORIES FROM PAKISTAN  
Ed by MOAZZAM SHEIKH  
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■ By Tara Sahgal

A shared colonial past makes Us a good reflection of Them. An acknowledgement of that pre-colonial reality is what *A Letter from India: Contemporary Short Stories from Pakistan* is trying to foster. Editor Moazzam Sheikh refers to British colonialism as “an era of discontinuity”, a breach in the rhythm of things and the reason for the loss of intimacy with our own literary and cultural traditions. That even today Salman Rushdie could make his infamous statement about the inferiority of “vernacular” literature is a sore point with Sheikh. Of Rushdie’s *Mirrorwork: Fifty Years of Indian Writing*, which included just one story in translation from a vernacular, Sheikh says, “(It’s a) parody of a sincere literary effort ... more of a service to the publishing industry than to readers.” With no institutions showing any intention of bridging the gap, it’s up to the individual to re-acquaint with indigenous languages and cultures, says Sheikh. Of the stories here, most have been translated into English from Urdu, Pashto, Siraiki and Punjabi and many of them reveal multilingual realities.

Some stories are clumsily translated; many are a seamless read and most of them are thematically interesting. The title story by Intizar Hussein is an impassioned epistolary plea from an ageing uncle to his nephew to continue to document their proud lineage, however scattered their family may now be across the borders. Zahr-ul-Haq’s “Spots” is an insight into the headspaces of self-hating homosexuals. The most memorable ones are: “Feeqa’s Death” by Nadir Ali; “Papa’s Girl” by Soniah Naheed Kamal; Sorayya Khan’s “The Buffalo” and Asad Mohammad Khan’s “The Squatter”. Should we say the Huns have arrived? ■



AUTHORSPEAK | RANDHIR KHARE

## The Bard of Kutch

After the scarce and sporadic rainfall that the region of Kutch gets, the desert turns into a vibrant green. The multi-hued flowers bloom in a mad frenzy, as if to overpower the lingering shadow of drought. This metaphor symbolises the people of Kutch. Pune-based Randhir Khare, author of *Kutch—The Triumph of Spirit* (Rupa), a travel narrative, says it is this ability of the Kutchis to live in the moment that has helped them face trials of time and circumstance. “Time has no consequence in Kutch. The living moment has a way of stretching into infinity, full with myth, legend, social and family history,” he says.

At 53 Kanpur-born Khare, who later lived in Kolkata, is a deeply emotional writer, something that will strike even a casual reader. His book runs on three parallel texts—history, geography and psychology, over-wrought with the emotive. But he denies the ability to pour out everything. “I experience, I internalise, I distil and I clarify. So what finally reaches the printed word tells a story,” says the author who wanted to see how perpetual change, crisis and flux had impacted the lives of Kutchis. Alongside photographer Susan Bullough, he made many trips to Kutch over a few years—the last one was just four months before the 2001 earthquake. Bullough’s photographs are the visual facets of Khare’s story. The two are working on a series on six tribal communities in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. Khare also has a soon-to-be published novel and a collection of poems.

An urge towards storytelling resonates in his sense of self as an author. “I am more of a bard—a storyteller in the true sense of the word. I can’t help it if this kind of writing is unglamorous to people,” he says, asserting that such a history needs to be written. “Kutch and its people are a metaphor for what was once the Indian spirit—now fractured by misplaced nationalism,” adds Khare, who says the Naxalbari movement of the late 1960s and the 1971 Bangladesh war tore his consciousness apart. This adaptability to walk on dry, cracked paths dots his book—much of which is as much about Khare’s convictions as about Kutch.

by Shefalee Vasudev