

A Visit to India

Cyril Dabydeen

1

A place I have never been to before,
but intrigued about since childhood.
Bihar or Mumbai, as the indenture spirit
is at a standstill: archives in me
as I make much ado about history,
or being a gymnast late at night with
images from *The Royal Reader*.
Tigers roaming, elephants marauding,
Shakuntala again pouring out with rain.

Where my ancestors have come from,
I pretend to acknowledge or not understand,
having denied other places from times past,
or living with lore of the Amazon instead:
evergreen forests bolstering a greenhouse
effect as environmentalists talk loudest.

2

Now in Ottawa in an Indian restaurant
with a Mexican name, the waitress takes in
Chandra Mohan, our Indian guest in authentic
attire, who mutters about Chairs of Canadian Studies
in India, or ways of making Canadian Literature
better known to a billion people there, all
in Delhi, Calcutta or Chennai, and where else?
Now James Reaney's an institution, he adds,
though he likes Margaret Atwood best.

So I ask, *Why the interest in Canada?*
Indeed it's about Rudy Weibe's *Big Bear*,
Robert Kroetsch's post-modernism,
or language-use in the Prairies, while I come
to grips with a tropical itch, being
foreign-born and mulling over ways
of coping with identity in Canada.

Post-colonialism strides I contemplate
 with Nehru's jewel-in-the-crown test or tryst
 with destiny, Empire being what my forefathers took
 less seriously while I'm here in the Great White North:

a Susanna Moodie frontier in me,
 as I claim to be a drawer of water and hewer
 of wood, or dwell on a garrison state because
 of the giant neighbour to the south,
 survival instincts merely--

Imagining continents that were once together,
 as metaphors indeed make the world one;
 and I again conjure up images like false truths,
 reinstating Mowgli because of Kipling,
 being astride an elephant and trundling along
 in a jungle safari with mahout shouts,
 blowing my horn because the British had been
 in India longest.

Now self-contained with aspirations
 or a further quest, I think about what might
 have been in Jaipur or Shimla, or some other place
 unknown to me while yet being a maharajah
 in an exotic wilderness.