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.