

thearts

While a student of English literature, I found it difficult to relate to the love poetry of Byron, Shelly, Keats and Coleridge. Their works, classics because the writing endures over time, still left me feeling alienated. I couldn't relate to odes to urns, and I inwardly rolled my eyes whenever I read another poem where women's anatomical parts are likened to roses and sunflowers.

An example of education spoiling recreational pursuit, I only recently began to enjoy reading poetry upon coming across Guyana-born poet Sase Persaud's collection, "In a Boston Night." While reading the first lines of "In a Boston Night" ("My unnecessary shirt a delay"), the gulf between poetry and I suddenly dissolved. I immediately recognized that I was reading poetry timeless in nature in its discussions of sensuality, love and mourning, but also modern for its interspersed of technology and discussion of contemporary politics.

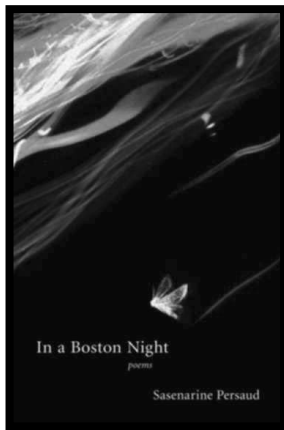
And for a man whose cerebral-looking author publicity photo gives the impression his poetry will be abstract and ethereal in nature, Persaud is in fact refreshingly sensual and realistic. Always surprised when I come across a frank discussion of bedroom politics, I enjoyed Persaud's "Morning After" and "Unplanned," poems that frankly describe the giving, taking and mistake-making that accompany intimacy.

Persaud's poetry is unapologetically sensual in nature, and it doesn't take long to find India in his work either.

He describes a former colleague "as bright/as a Krishna-blue bulb" and calls his lover "Rani," or queen. In fact, the collection is riddled with places, exotic locales such as India, Trinidad and Dover, and more

Flavors of India blossom in Sase Persaud's poetry

Guyana-born poet's "In a Boston Night" is a reflection of his heritage and love in the time of technology



Kavita Ramdya

mundane ones like Boston's Brookline, Florida and Connecticut; these are prominent supporting characters in Persaud's work. In fact, as a Boston University alumna, it was somewhat surreal for me to read poems that take place on campus, a setting that clearly inspired Persaud. He recalls how, sitting in classrooms that overlooked Boston's Charles River, it "seeped into my consciousness."

And laugh I did when he pokes fun at idealistic yet sheltered undergraduate students: "My book of seductions too

dusty/for a recent SexHigh Graduate's touch," and in "Backing the Charles": "The democrats came in a tsunami/... a wasteful war could buy/healthcare for the national, that illiterate/cannot pronounce 'nuclear,' doesn't know/the name of the Canadian Prime Minister!" A reminder of how idiotic we all sounded when we were younger versions of ourselves, even Persaud's narrative style in his poetry can't conceal the inane dribble university students purport as political awareness. "Waiting Near the

Charles River" reminded me to be thankful that modern technology didn't flourish until after I married.

The infinite number of ways to get in touch real-time via iPhones, Facebook, mobile technology and Blackberrys has not altered love's natural pace. The universal expectation that technology will facilitate immediate gratification when it comes to matters of love is unrealistic; like love during any other era, it will not allow itself to be fast-forwarded. The poet describes waiting for his mobile phone to ring:

"The mobile's a bright blue screen.
Date and time, the server's name.
And mine. Strength of signal good.
Three bars - four black drinking-glass
Bands. The message box icon
Useless. The ringer silent. Your name
not appearing. Your voice unheard."

In "Half a Life," Persaud recounts the effect his mother's death has had on his life when he describes "how for years/I cried when no one looked, and even/when they did and even now; you lose/ a mother and lose and gain half a life." At a talk at the University of South Florida's Humanities Institute, the poet described how his mother's death influenced him to write about mourning and loss:

"I remembered that I was 8 years old when my mother died. For months afterwards, whenever anyone mentioned my mother, or mothers, I cried. I cried in private. I cried in public. I cried anywhere. I cried everywhere. It was many years before I ceased being affected by mention of the word 'mother,' even while I still mourned for my mother, and felt her loss. ... I have written many poems, and even a novel, on loss and grief, but no matter what I wrote, I still had not captured what I wanted to say about

the loss of my mother. But suddenly ... I felt that I knew what I wanted to say all these years ... I wrote, 'Mourning,' "

In "Mourning," Persaud writes:

"A mother lost
is a mother waiting to be found. Grief
is not a migraine
it is a whole life.

Holidays, too, are a time for remembering his deceased mother, as Persaud describes family members wistful, on Christmas Day, "if your mother were here ..."

Turning secular and highly commercialized holidays into opportunities for writing poetry, in "Thanksgiving" he lists typically eastern ingredients for an Indo-Caribbean family Thanksgiving meal: "turmeric corn, lime peas, flaky roti, curried Yukon, Basmati." All of the NRI and second-generation Indian Americans I know, including myself, are familiar with "Indian-zed" Thanksgiving dinners where parathas and keema, mixed vegetables and kheer accompany cranberries and yams, turkey and stuffing.

And in "Christmas," food once again emerges as a potent force in expressing heritage and culture: "pouring frothy ginger beer or sweet rice/wine to go with the tropical fruit cake." Even poets register the often-anticlimactic nature of the holiday season and the disappointment which inevitably follows the build-up. In "Goodbye to the Holidays," Persaud writes, "I ... give a perfunctory/hug, scratch my list of tender things I did not do. Next time."

Kavita Ramdya is author of "Bollywood Weddings: Dating, Engagement and Marriage in Hindu America" www.bollywood-weddings.com

In 1st solo show in N.Y., artist explores after effects of terrorism

By a Staff Writer

Before it is too late and his exhibition moves out, visit the Aicon gallery to see the solo exhibition of artist Rathin Kanji's works. In his recent works, Kanji addresses the worldwide upsurge in terrorism and insurgency movements since the turn of the century and the socio-psychological effects of those on our increasingly globalized community.

Titled "Unfold the Truth," the exhibition has been on since Dec. 15, and moves on Jan. 23, according to Aicon's Web site.



Using media images of armed conflict and its aftereffects combined with language and rhetoric, Kanji assembles his understanding in a puzzle format that viewers have to decode and interpret, a press release from Aicon said.

The pictorial language of Kanji's canvases and installa-

tions owes little or nothing to the conventions of Indian art, instead draws from a Western idiom inspired by artists such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. "His style is cool and incisive - even surgical, but his message is hot, and somewhat urgent," the release said.

The seemingly interactive

mode of appreciation Kanji's puzzles generate is the artist's way of also exploring the unequal distribution of wealth between states and peoples, as well as their increased economic interdependence on one another in an era of rapid globalization.

"Recent changes in the global economy, the increase of radical political ideologists and the increase of antistate terrorism are all reasons for an increased rounding up of suspects," Kanji is quoted as saying in the release. "The intention of my recent work is to help build up our mental strength to combat these feelings of fear; feelings that arise out of uncertainty for our lives

due to a rapid increase in terror all over the world. Through my painting, installation and video I have tried to address and reveal these crucial issues to the viewer."

Born in Kolkata in 1970, Kanji received his postgraduate degree in painting from Kala Bhavana Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal, in 2002.

He was a visiting research fellow (Fulbright scholar) at the School of Art and Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 2003-04.

He has had solo exhibitions in Munich, Turkey, Dubai, Bangkok and throughout India. This is his first solo show in New York.