

## Nonsense Poetry

**TALK:** *Nonsense Poetry – Sanskrit Translation and Anticipations of Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky*

**Speaker:** Professor Ashok Aklujkar

**Chair:** Dr. Chandra Rajan, December 8

When a free spirit sought to express itself, it went beyond words, meanings and conventionally understood sounds to capture the mood of the poet. Lewis Carroll was well-known for such flights into the expanse of the imagination, where his imagined world sparkled with the brilliance of impossibilities becoming possibilities and reality refreshingly unreasonable.

To translate the excursions of the Anglican deacon-cum-mathematics professor would however, be a daunting task. Ashok Aklujkar, Professor Emeritus, Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, took on just this task. He translated Jabberwocky into Sanskrit.

As audiences racked their memory on 'nonsense poetry' in Sanskrit, Aklujkar went on to describe

his fantastic journey into the world of words spanning familiar sounding words, portmanteau words and the possibility of words borrowed from other cultures. In his translation too, Aklujkar has tried to capture the texture of the poem through sounds, titling the Jabberwocky, *lavasa-karala-drstam jarbharivakkiya*. His journey into the world of nonsense threw up many exhilarating discoveries of possible nonsensical verses in Sanskrit that already exist... even a passage in the *Rg Veda*? Could he use some of the already employed devices to create a Sanskrit Jabberwocky, could he devise some new ideas? And of course, the inevitable question: was Carroll influenced by India? Discovering the method in nonsense, which Aklujkar called 'technical nonsense' was fascinating.

Trust man (the gender bias irresistible) to make sense even of nonsense. Reaching out beyond the relationships of words and their meanings, some liberated souls coined new words, jammed up some others, extended themselves into the domains of explorations with a free spirit. To define the free spirit became the wont of literatures.

■ SUDHAMAHİ REGUNATHAN

## Two Literary Evenings

**READINGS:** *Poetry Live – Kwame S.N. Dawes*

**Collaboration:** The Poetry Society, India, Atlas Magazine and Aark Arts Publishers, December 7

*Shopping for Sabzi*

**Speaker:** Nitin Deckha

**Chair:** Samrat Choudhury, December 18

Two interesting literary programmes were organized recently. The first was a poetry reading by Kwame S.N. Dawes, the distinguished American poet. Melding lyric, reggae and raga in his poetry, this Emmy Award and Pushcart Prize winning poet read poems about his family and his children. The second was when Nitin Deckha, an acclaimed Indo-Canadian writer, read and discussed his collection of short stories, *Shopping for Sabzi*.

Deckha's stories continue in the tradition of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, except that they are

narrated in a lighter vein. The present collection interwove themes of ambition and identity in the lives of its brash, young and successful Indo-Canadian and Indo-American characters.

The title 'Shopping for Sabzi' is used figuratively. This is evident in the first story 'Spik and Span' which deals with the matrimonial planning of the Gujarati Samaj of America. Shilpa doubts the path she has taken when asked to match-make at a marriage convention in New Jersey. 'Potatoes and Punjabis are Everywhere' deals with the adventures of a first generation immigrant to Canada. Happy, a college student, during his first days in Toronto, considers whether to cut or keep his unshorn hair.

In the discussion that followed, Deckha was asked about issues of racism and antagonism. Deckha replied that all his students avidly watch Bollywood films, and globalization and consumerism have ensured that India has a large cultural presence abroad. His stories reflect contemporary trends and social groupings, he said.

■ RACHNA JOSHI