



# WRITERS IN CONVERSATION



## **Globizen Poetry and *Living between Two Worlds*: a conversation with Bashabi Fraser**

**Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha &  
Dhritiman Chakrabarty**

*Bashabi Fraser is a transnational writer who has lived in London, Kolkata and Darjeeling and now lives and writes in Edinburgh. She is a poet, editor, children's writer, translator and critic. Her recent publications include Ragas & Reels (poems on migration and diaspora, 2012), Scots Beneath the Banyan Tree: Stories from Bengal (2012); From the Ganga to the Tay (an epic poem, 2009); Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter (2006; 2008), A Meeting of Two Minds: the Geddes Tagore Letters (2005) and Tartan & Turban (poetry collection, 2004). Her awards include the Women Empowered: Arts and Culture Award in 2010 and the IAS Prize for Literary Services in Scotland in 2009. Her research and writing traverse continents, crossing borders and boundaries with ease, making her a global citizen (or a 'Globizen') and her Muse can be characterized as 'Globizen' poetry. Bashabi is an executive committee member of the Writers in Prison Committee (Scotland) and the Poetry Association of Scotland and has been on the Scottish PEN committee for two terms. She is a Trustee of the Kolkata Scottish Heritage Trust, Associate Member of the Patrick Geddes Trust and has been a Consultant Advisor for the Kolkata British Council's Kolkata-Scotland Connection program. Bashabi is a Professor of English and Creative Writing and Joint Director of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs, which she has helped to establish) at Edinburgh Napier University. Bashabi is also a Royal Literary Fund Fellow based at the University of Dundee.*

*Bashabi Fraser spoke on her books and other issues to Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha & Dhritiman Chakrabarty for Writers in Conversation, when she came to deliver an invited lecture in Visva Bharati University, India in August 2013.*

**ASP & DC:** You and the experience of your changing worlds must have been amazing, having spent your childhood in London, completing your secondary school education in the Himalayas and then coming to Edinburgh for your research and ultimately homing in there in Edinburgh. How would you characterise yourself, a global writer, an expatriate diaspora writer, a writer with no countries or as you said, 'a writer divided between two worlds'?

**BF:** I would describe myself, as you have rightly pointed out as living between two worlds. In a way I guess I always dwell in the interstitial spaces wherever I am, since I am perceived as someone who has left her homeland, and someone who doesn't quite belong to the

'somewhere' she has arrived at. There is no hostility in either perception, just an acceptance by Indians in India that I now live somewhere else and that I don't quite belong in the eyes of the host community in Scotland. However, there is a certain comfort for fellow Indians in India, that my loyalties remain with my 'earth mother', that I continue to write about India and will remain her cultural ambassador wherever I am. I guess social scientists would assign me the position of the *insider-outsider* now, even in my own country. I consider myself a transnational poet and academic. I cross and re-cross the borders between Britain and India with curiosity and interest. My in-between positioning gives me a certain advantage, an objectivity and even a weapon with which I can question, challenge, reflect on issues in both my countries, without feeling the need to conform to the 'norm'. I cross borders and boundaries with ease now, excited every time I visit India and calmly relieved when I come back to Scotland. There is no sense of ever having left 'home', as there is a sense of homecoming in both journeys. As a transnational writer, I carry my two worlds with me – always.

**ASP & DC:** While asking you to comment on a united-divided world, one really finds it hard to resist quoting the following lines:

In all those years  
Before we knew that butterflies  
Were free to share our separate skies  
That they could cross with graceful ease  
To alight on stationary trees  
On either side of this strange line  
That separates yours from mine  
For whose existence we rely  
Entirely on our inward eye  
This border by whose callous side  
Our inert wheel lies stultified  
This border that cuts like a knife  
Through the waters of our life  
Slicing fluid rivers with  
The absurdity of a new myth  
That denies centuries  
Of friendships and families  
This border that now decrees  
One shared past  
with two histories  
This border that now decides  
The sky between us as two skies  
This border born of blood spilt free  
Makes you my friend, my enemy.

Now this is indeed brilliant stuff, but how do you see the future unfolding in a world blighted with terror attacks and a more frenzied sense of ethnic identities? How does your poetry react to this?

**BF: Like Tagore, I see problems with narrow nationalism, which can easily slide into sectarian violence. The weapons lobby in the rich countries wields unimaginable power in a globalised context. It is a lucrative business, and in order to have a continuing market, conflicts are necessary. What worries me is that off shore wars are easy to distance oneself from as the reality on the ground never really hits home in the countries sending troops out and/supplying weapons in these conflict zones (except in the coffins and disabled bodies coming home).**

I think the other worry is our dependence on oil which has led to untold horrors in the past (the Biafra War) and the continuing instability in Iraq and Libya, bringing so much suffering to their people. Our double standards also become evident as we never raise questions about the way women are treated in Saudi Arabia, since we are so reliant on their oil, but march without hesitation into Afghanistan, knowing that that country cannot hit us back on our shores with air power and military intervention.

I feel sad that the world is divided as never before on religious grounds. I am alarmed at the demonisation of Islam, which can only create more suspicion and fear and I feel a sense of despair when I find that young people are willing to believe that their lives in this world are useless and they need to blow themselves up in order to kill innocent civilians whom they don't know and haven't met and so can have nothing against on a personal level.

I think, left to ourselves, people can forge friendships, build bridges, and dispel the notion of the 'other'. The intervention of politics, of military interference with vested interests, brings about divisions that inflame hostility between nations. Personally, I feel there needs to be more dialogue in this world – persistent dialogue. Tagore believed in what Michael Collins has called the 'liberal politics of friendship', which could bring about a meeting of minds. Tagore's many restless journeys across the world to meet leading intellectuals, artists and world leaders in his day, his historic conversations, his many talks and lectures on the world stage – always delivered on invitation – were aimed at effecting an understanding between the East and West, in the conviction that he could bring the world closer together. This is something the Scots polymath, Sir Patrick Geddes, too believed in and tried to effect through his life's work. We need more men (and women) like Tagore and Geddes today. I would welcome a world without borders as Europe has for EU citizens, but I guess that is a poet's dream and poets are allowed to dream ...

ASP & DC: Your poetic *oeuvre* is not located in a fixed geographical anchorage, you write about the Himalayas and also about the Scottish Highlands, you converge in one of your poetry books the river Ganga with the Tay – how do you befriend such diverse cultural and geographical tropes in your poetic domain? Does it happen automatically out of your multi-polar nationality or do you consciously do this to forge a transnational Muse?

**BF: I am a daughter of two brilliant geographers, so I have grown up listening to debates on attitudes to our planet's resources, environmental sustainability and the contesting pull of**

the urban and rural. Growing up on the foothills and going to school in the Himalayas, brought home the sheer majesty of the world's highest mountains. Their wooded beauty, the stunning snow-laden Kanchenjunga with its confident elegance and the explosion of range after range unfolding endlessly, made one feel quite humbled. The Himalayas were magnetic. I felt them pulling me back whenever I was away from them for a few months. I had to go back and experience the cloud country, the rolling mists, the bracing cold air and the brilliant constant sun, especially on winter days. I thought I could never really leave the Himalayas behind. But coming to the Scottish Highlands, what has struck me is the grandeur of a landscape where the hills have been smoothed by geological time. The lochs that carve a space between the vistas of hills, create a landscape that is almost magical. Here it is quite easy to imagine Nessie the monster appearing to witness the shadow play of clouds in this combination of ben and glen. Moreover, Edinburgh has her seven hills, which lend the city a rural aura with their dramatic interjection.

However, as a writer who has moved back and forth between the two worlds, the consciousness of the connections between my two nations through time has been the subject of fascinating journeys for me. The Himalayas and the Highlands and Edinburgh Hills often act as a refracting lens of the 'there' from the 'here', leading to a certain geographical disorientation which can be fascinating in its many layered complexity. The rivers, the Ganga and the Tay, raise questions about the environment, about war and peace in countries harbouring nuclear warheads, while reinforcing their life sustaining reliability if we value and respect their contribution to life. And it is this validation of life that draws me to the stories rivers have to tell. They represent the transnational as they defy the political shadow lines – to borrow a term from Amitav Ghosh – and draw populations from the 'elsewhere' to their banks by the very nature of their multiple gifts. The fact that they stand as witnesses, just as the mountains and hills do, to man's many journeys, make them the embodiment of the various quests and endeavours that man has undertaken through the centuries. This is the continuity and connection between nations through people's movements and experiences, interactions and interdependence that they signify, which I find compelling and try to express through my research and writing.

ASP & DC: Do you think that diaspora poetry should be bracketed as a specific genre or in this globalized world, diaspora poetry or transnational literature should become the norm? In other words, how do you see the emergence of future world literature premised on trans-cultural crosspollination? A kind of world without boundaries generating literature without nationalities, does it sound too naïve or are there chances of its feasibility in the near future?

BF: Recently I was in Germersheim in Germany, presenting a paper at a plenary at a conference on the subject of Scottish Independence, intriguingly entitled 'Coming of Age and the Loss of Innocence', implying a metaphoric loss of an Edenic tranquility through a rite of passage. The debate the conference generated was riveting. One participant was Professor Ian Duncan, who spoke about Walter Scott's novels transcending Scottish Borders, having an appeal in England, Europe and America in historic romances which portray human dignity. I pointed out to Ian that my parents and grandparents generation had grown up on a diet of

Scott's novels, reading him in English and in Bengali translations. My intervention reaffirmed Ian's proposition of Scott's work as having the status of world literature, travelling over nation-state boundaries through time, a way in which many texts of the past and today can be categorised.

Diasporic communities have existed through the centuries, but somehow, the term evokes an enforced uprooting and scattering through concentrated violence of communities like the Jewish, Armenian or Palestinian, who experienced trauma, a sense of loss and the pain of knowing there is no possibility of return to one's 'homeland'. However, there have been the diaspora in settler colonies, which did not come without acts of violence, as they were not willing to compromise the presence of the natives in these spaces that were appropriated by powers with superior maritime and military power. Though diasporic settler colonies retained contact with their nation of origin through trade and business links, social networks and remittances to families and donations for public works, it was a more acceptable situation that saw globalisation foster. Colonisation created the reality of contact zones, which explains why people from colonies are now 'here' because the colonial presence was once 'there' – their place of origin being now their 'elsewhere'. I guess all these forms of diaspora will continue to be formed as globalisation in trade and commerce and communication continues to be facilitated by technological advancement, bringing a speed to travel and exchange which sees transnationalism as an inevitable reality of people crossing, recrossing and even challenging borders and boundaries. Writers (and readers), as always, are as Said says, positioned. The writers in English or French, from former colonies, are a witness to this global process. And if one takes writers from the sub-continent, they can live between Delhi and London like Vikram Seth, in Canada like Michael Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry, between Karachi and London like Kamila Shamsi, in London and New York like Salman Rushdie, in Kolkata and London like Amit Chaudhuri, between Amsterdam and Oxford like Amal Chatterjee or live in New York, Sheffield, London or Edinburgh, like Amitav Ghosh, Debjani Chatterjee, Shanta Acharya and me, respectively, but continue to make regular journeys to their country of origin, writers who are all comfortable to live somewhere else, but returning to the elsewhere in their writing, while being aware of and influenced by the local where they reside. In the somewhere, the community round these writers is changing, as new migrants arrive, new conflicts erupt in distant places which are not so distant as their repercussions are felt not just through an ever alert and selective media, but through their impact on our very lives wherever we are based. The transcultural/ transnational can only become more pertinent as a global readership shows a keen interest in Khaled Hosseini's *Kabul*, Azar Nafisi's *Tehran*, Tan Twan Eng's *Kuala Lumpur* or Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul*. And for many writers, their vision will continue to shift between their nations – ancestral and adopted.

ASP & DC: Tell us something about your experience and objectives as the Director of the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs) at Edinburgh Napier University where you teach. Why Tagore? Is it because he, like Goethe, exemplifies the idea of a world poet or world literature? What is the response of Scottish students on Tagore? You have also written a significant book on Tagore and Patrick Geddes, two towering intellectual minds of two different continents,

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Bashabi Fraser, Transnational Writer. Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha & Dhritiman Chakrabarty.  
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converging on many issues and planning to consummate their intellectual and creative friendship through greater convergence of the two horizons. Please tell us something on this book.

**BF: When my parents went back from London to India, I couldn't understand why they did. As a child I was too polite to question them. My parents joined a campus university on the foothills of the Himalayas. Looking back, I realise it was an idyllic life. We grew up with Tagore. Every seminar, tree-planting ceremony, festival, exhibition, began with a Tagore song. Every conference was followed in the evening with a Tagore song recital and/or dance drama. We listened to his music, danced to his songs, acted his plays and read his poetry and fiction. There was always something in Tagore that could reflect every mood, fit every occasion. He was like an unfailing wellspring for our cultural expression. Tagore gave us solace and joy. Yet he had been jealously guarded by some Bengalis. Shakespeare is enjoyed by the world because he was generously allowed to travel beyond Britain's borders. I wanted to share Tagore, the Renaissance Man, rather than own him, letting others experience the richness of this great artist and activist's work and vision.**

At Edinburgh Napier University I have been fortunate to have the support of my colleague, Professor Linda Dryden, who has worked with me to establish the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs). But it would not have come about without the impetus of our former Principal, Dame Professor Joan Stringer and the Consul General of Scotland, Dr Anil Anand and the Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Dr Suresh Goel. It has had the full consensus of Edinburgh Napier University's Vice Principals, our Dean of Faculty and Head of School and some of my colleagues, which has ensured the Centre's place in a Scottish University. We have introduced Tagore's work into our English syllabus and the response from students has been most encouraging.

I have edited and introduced the correspondence between Tagore and Geddes and the book has seen three revised editions (2002, 2004 and 2005), the last entitled *A Meeting of Two Minds: the Geddes-Tagore Letters* (Edinburgh: Wordpower Books). This book embodies the shared ideas of two polymaths – great thinkers who believed that education should be innovative, creative and interdisciplinary, with universities maintaining a sense of continuity with their surroundings. They believed in the efficacy of education fostered by the intimacy of campus universities and strove to establish International universities, where the world would meet in a 'nest'. They were visionaries, actively involved in projects for environmental sustainability and rural reconstruction. Both were against narrow nationalism and were warriors of peace. In their time, they were international figures; Tagore was simply known as The Poet and Geddes as The Professor. My Introduction analyses a significant friendship between two transnational men who tried to bring the East and West together through their work and writing,

**For there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor Birth  
When two strong men come face to face though they come from the ends of the earth!**

ASP & DC: Keeping aside the utopia of a world literature/world writer, if we focus on the praxis, what is your take on contemporary global ground realities? While notions of a unified world sounds fine, how would you react to issues of racial divide and ethnic discrimination as a poet? To put it straight, do you find yourself alienated in a 'foreign-native' land? Do you see yourself as the Other and does your poetry have anything to say on this question of alterity and otherification?

**BF: Poets, and in fact, writers, are political, as they have to take a stand on various issues. As a South Asian writer in Scotland, I belong to that in-between space, interstitial as Bhabha would call it. However, I come from a family that has been displaced by Partition and experienced the post-Partition struggle as a post-Midnight child, growing up in a Bengal where the refugee from east Bengal was not quite welcome. We, as Bangals, were the Other in a divided nation. In 1964, we witnessed communal violence in the then Calcutta and once again experienced dislocation as my parents opted to move to North Bengal.**

**Yet here, with time, I have seen the steady erosion of communal harmony in the Darjeeling Himalayan district with disruptive separatist movements that continue to threaten further vivisection through the demand for new borders, effecting a polarisation of communities along ethnic lines and a further truncated state. I am left wondering –will my extended family members and friends once again be forced to become uprooted once again? We seem to need to create the other to justify our selfhood and appropriation of demands for the allocation of privileges and opportunities. It comes from a deep sense of human insecurity and a lack of faith in our own potential and possibilities for achievement or fulfilment. I have several poems on the divisions we create amongst ourselves in poems like 'This Border' which you quote above, 'Borders and Boundaries', 'Barbed Wire', 'Walled in/Walled out', 'War', and 'This Difference'. Wherever I am, I will continue to write from the margins as it were.**

ASP & DC: You once made a very important observation on the vocation of the writer, saying that a writer has to be political in her poetic/literary outbursts and therefore, the question arises, how would you react to current geo-political issues? Should a writer be involved in political concerns or keep an aesthetic distance?

**BF: I have been writing a series of poems called 'Letters to my Mother'. My mother died in 2005. She was a very sensitive person with a great intellect. She was gentle but always a staunch believer in non-violence. I could speak to her about everything – about world politics, international terrorism, occupation armies, civil war, unequal distribution of the world's resources, deprivation of women in many societies, of global warming and climate change and of the widening gap between the haves and have-nots of this world. For a long time after my mother's death, I could not write about her. Then one night I saw her in a dream, not as she was in her last few months of acute dementia, but as she had always been, observant, caring, resourceful and warm. I awoke and the poem wrote itself like a gift from somewhere and that was the beginning of this series which I am editing now to be published this year as letters in which I 'talk' to my mother about geo-political issues as I would have done if she had been alive. But in this forthcoming collection, there are poems to other**

**women, to other mothers, so the book, as my publisher has suggested, will be called 'Letters to my Mother and Other Mothers', voicing my concerns, thoughts and responses to global and social concerns and as they affect women's lives.**

ASP & DC: Your recent epic *From the Ganga to Tay* is a brilliant attempt to concretise the dialogue between two rivers, longest in their own respective lands. The idea of an epical conversation between two of the most important rivers materialises a conversation of two different cultures, and yet it unearths the commonalities between the two rivers / cultures. In the riverine conversation you brilliantly dragged in issues of colonialism, the atom bomb, revolutions, jute trades of Empire, ecology, spiritual/material binaries and so forth. The photographs that adorn the book are also magnificently akin to the theme of the poem. Would you like to call it a post globalised *Waste Land* that generates unlike T.S. Eliot's apocalyptic monologue of Tiresias, a global multivalence of concerns about the past, the present and the future? The poem significantly ends with the word 'shanti' too.

**BF: Rivers stand for continuity and embody the certainty of a sustainable environment. They nurture life and are witness to the growth of civilisations on their banks. The Ganga and the Tay are rivers which have a shared history of a colonial encounter and an interchange, their economies linked in a seesaw of experience affected by world trade and world wars. Their journeys mirror the various compromises they have to make to woo a resisting landscape and carve their path from their inception to the final confluence with the sea. Their tide and ebb, their disastrous excesses and their despair in times of elusive rain clouds, capture the moods of human successes and trials. But as a postcolonial, transnational writer, rivers for me signify sustenance, if heeded and respected. I am aware of the atrocities man can afflict on man. But I do believe, that like Tagore and Geddes, like the Ganga and the Tay, nations can converse and communicate and come together through a deeper understanding generated through dialogue, which cannot be effected through weapons, and water, not thunder or fire, can bring about this Shanti – Peace.**

ASP & DC: Can we say that your epic *From the Ganga to Tay* is a real postcolonial epic, because while it writes back to the Empire it also constitutes the space for the East to render its own story? It chronicles through the dialogue of two rivers, both the clash of civilisations and at the same time forges a way forward on the plank of greater cross-civilisation understanding? We felt that this poem of yours should find a place in the university curriculum of both Britain and England, because it has the potential to help revisit history and to plan a better future of transnationalism. What is your take on that?

**BF: The poem has been narrated at concerts by leading actors and storytellers and poets, with Ganga speaking as the Mother Goddess and Tay – of Celtic and Nordic divine heritage with his northern masculine pragmatism – conversing against the backdrop of music, both classical and folk, from the East and West, played by a talented musician and composer. In its tracing of a shared history between nations, through space and time, it has the epic sweep of the very rivers whose voices we hear as they meander across the page, mirroring their deliberate search for a course in forcefully carved pathways, reinforcing their essential**

**presence to reaffirm with deliberate vigour that if life is to continue on our planet, it can, with the philosophy of life-sustaining flowing fresh water. Their rhythms signify the rhythm of life itself, their music spells harmony and they defy political shadow lines in their transcultural journeys that embrace humanity in a social inclusion that is desirable if not fully attainable. As a postcolonial transnational text and a modern epic, yes, it would be good to see it on English Literature curricular, but that is a decision for others involved in framing the canon to make.**

ASP & DC: In your anthology of poems, *Tartan & Turban*, one comes across the East in many ways, in poems like, 'I am the Absolute', or in other poems of your earlier anthology, *Best Wishes from Edinburgh*, you have engaged with figures and images from the Indian pantheon such as Goddess Durga, images of Indian festival of colour like Holi and narrated about Kathak, the famous North Indian classical dance form. Now are they just an attempt to exoticise the poetic oeuvre or to assert for the multivalence and polysemic taxonomy of a transnational poet?

**BF: Since India has always remained a part of me even when I have travelled away from her, I have retained an intimacy with her culture, her festivals and her diversity as I grew up amidst her vibrant reality, a participant in her social fabric. I have trained in Kathak and have a Sangeet Visharad in the dance form, have taught, performed and choreographed and directed dance shows and dance dramas. I dance, sing, write the rhythms of India and always will. But I have also felt the transfusion of Western music in my creative oeuvre, right from the time I was seven, when I was in London. In truth, when I left London as a child, London didn't leave me. Now I have left India, but India hasn't left me. And I know that if I leave Scotland, Scotland won't leave me.**

Since I have (re-)crossed boundaries of nation, journeyed physically away from my homeland, I guess, like many transnational writers, I take on the role of a cultural ambassador, explaining and bringing the East to the West and the West to the East. It is not a consciously chosen self-imposed task, but an inevitable positioning of a writer who is influenced and moved by multiple experiences and absorbs the 'elsewhere' and the 'somewhere' and imbues them with her own views, which perhaps, becomes a recognisable 'voice'.

ASP & DC: In poems such as 'Borders and Boundaries' and 'War', your political sense comes to the fore. How would you react to the current geo-political conjuncture? As a poet are you hopeful of a just, war free world which is to come? In other words, how do you visualise what Giorgio Agamben called the coming community'?

**BF: The younger generation in Northern Ireland has taken a stand. They have told their fathers and grandfathers that the Troubles which were nurtured by an indoctrinated enmity had not done anything to uplift the economy of their region or create opportunities for development and a sustainable future for them. They had had enough of violence and destruction. The violence of the older generation had given them nothing of prosperity, peace or stability. This generation was not ready to carry the same arms and patrol the**

streets of Belfast or Derry, looking for targets as their forefathers had done. The same has happened in Iran where the young will not be held back with the rhetoric of enmity with the West and the world in the name of defending their religion, but want to live normal lives with freedom of thought and expression, be creative and see modernity flow back into their rich socio-cultural economic fabric. Talks have begun with these once isolated nations and borders have been and are being dissipated and challenged as Ireland has a Parliament where both parties meet on a platform with common consent and the new Iranian President meets and shakes hands with the American President with the current Ayatollah's approval. So dialogue is possible to ensure a conflict-free world. 'Borders and Boundaries' reflects on the arrogance of power where we jealously guard our own frontiers but have no qualms about invading other lands. Another poem of mine, 'This Border', is in the voice of a child speaking to his friend as their shared lives are splintered when a mindless border fragments a nation. 'War' was written after the disturbing news of two friends – one Catholic and the other Protestant– being murdered for daring to build a friendship across religious boundaries of social acceptance. As long as weapons-making remains a lucrative industry, the world will need to create conflict zones to justify all lethal production. Princess Diana did campaign to ban landmines and succeeded. Maybe we need a people's movement to say 'NO' to the production and use of weapons. We also need more dialogue between powers, more efforts to foster communication between people, and dissipate ideas of difference and distance that allow the constructs of the 'us' and 'them' in an oppositional imaginary that is damaging to the prospect of transcultural interchange.

ASP & DC: In your poems like 'Shadow Lines', you articulate your disgust against a world ravaged by borders and shadow-lines of separations amongst nations in lines like:

I am the Daughter of the earth.  
I was born to walk free  
to traverse her expanse  
to thrive in liberty... it was my body that they  
Riddled with no trace of sorrow  
chopping and scattering it  
with no thought of tomorrow.

What future do you envisage of transnational poetry such as yours, which perhaps can bring forth a cross-border and trans-border poetics into play?

**BF: What is reassuring is that I am not alone, as poets across space and time have willed a world without borders and restrictions to be written into existence, and become emblematic of the voice of a nation that reaches out to other nations. I can immediately think of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rabindranath Tagore, Jack Mapanje, Chenjerai Hove, Dunya Mikhael, Ghareeb Iskander, Mahmoud Darwish, Dennis Vincent Brutus, Nguyen Chi Thien, Shi Tao, Cheran, Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Tenzin Tsundue, W.H. Auden, Hamish Henderson and Liu Xiaobo to name a few. One hopes that the power of poetry from multiple poets can pierce the stratosphere with the brilliance and constancy of a constellation from which we cannot**

**turn away without losing the only magical light that might be left to us on our darkest of journeys.**

ASP & DC: You once famously said in one of your oft-quoted poems

of living between two world  
That I cannot maintain.

Have you ultimately found means to maintain the two horizons of your life or do you see the possibility of the two worlds coming together? How do you negotiate the two worlds now?

**BF: Wherever I am, I see my other land through a refracted light and lens as an ever-present luminous reality. This does not mean to say that my mind is always 'elsewhere', though physically I may be grounded in a temperate or tropical reality. What it does mean is that I have a dual existence, where the 'here' and 'there' merge and converge; at its best, it can be a prismatic luminosity of rainbow inclusivity and at its worst, it can be bafflingly disorienting. However, it is where I belong, a no-man's interstitial space which I have chosen as my own, a mindscape of immense creative potential and possibility.**

ASP & DC: In your earlier works, the lyrical and meditative tone of your descriptions and the concentrated depth of your intense poetic moments are found engraved in your lines. You appear more in those poems a personal poet, or a poet ensconced within her own world of memorabilia, pathos and pure lyricism. However, interspersed within these rich lyrical and personal strains are occasional glimpses of strong socio-political positions in poems such as 'A Living Death' (dealing with widow burning), 'There is no body to Bury' (hate crimes and communal killings), 'Ayodhya' (communal politics), etc. This really widens your horizon and demonstrates how poetically dexterous and at the same time ethico-political you can be at the same time. Would you like to elaborate on this?

**BF: Personal pain can be countered and even surmounted through poetry. However, when one puts one's own tragedies in perspective, the overwhelming injustices of society, the magnitude of an unforgivable violence on a national scale can erupt in a volcanic outpouring of anguish and fury in poetry. Behind the passion and anger are the fine tools of form and metaphor, chiselling words, hammering lines to a harmonious acquiescence that can then carry the burden of an offering.**

This unembarrassed love affair with words and form has found an outlet in one of my recent collections, *Ragas & Reels: poems on migration and diaspora* (2012) which has photographs by Herman Rodrigues chronicling the Scottish-Indian connections, as Scots went to India and brought back names and ideas which populate the Scottish landscape in fragments of a cultural encounter. The book also records visual stories of South Asians in Scotland, who are here, because the Scots were once there, reaffirming a long historic connection in a postcolonial, diasporic reality. These 'New Scots' bring South Asian flavours and colours to Scotland in their cuisine, their fabric designs, their festivals and places of worship. They bring their professional expertise as doctors, engineers, scientists, academics,

business entrepreneurs, chefs, and artists to the nation a multidimensionality that pushes the boundaries of race and colour, underscoring Scotland's pluralism. The collection recognises a charging globalisation, as many South Asians are now itinerants as students and computer experts who are a young, footloose generation who have their eye on the horizon, who have stopped temporarily in Scotland drawn with a magnetic pull, but this young wave of incomers will move on as the world beyond beckons as their playground of opportunities. The book shows how the South Asian diaspora settle and scatters across the globe and many now return to a transformed, economically burgeoning sub-continent. The poems in this book are narratives of individuals and communities, who have contributed to Scottish society, raising fresh questions of social justice and social inclusion as a desirable future for Scotland as a nation. The poems play with stanzaic form, using couplets, tercets, quatrains, or five, six, seven and eight line stanzas, exploring a range of forms from the sonnet, villanelle, concrete poem, acrostic, linked haiku, tanka to free verse. While they reflect on Herman's telling images, and as such, can be seen as companion pieces, they have the freedom of artistic expression and can thus stand alone in their evocative appeal, borne of a storytelling impulse and a linguistic and formative virtuosity. I had great fun shaping each verse story on the page to make the lives of a sub-continental population come alive for me and the reader.

Many of the communities in Scotland have come here from conflict zones at different periods in the world's history, and as I see the world continuing to erupt with divisive politics driving fresh rifts into multicultural societies, I continue to respond to events which affect individuals and communities as poets must, with an urgent sense of anxiety and a salvageable truth that lies in human potential and its power to be creative and restorative – a faith that Tagore sustained even when he witnessed the world being subsumed by the flames of World War II from his deathbed in 1941 in Kolkata. Tagore felt that the East could bring some solace and a sense of sublimation to the West, in the message from its ancient philosophy that remains relevant in a modern world. This is something I believe poets can do, that is, strive to bring the East and West closer through a continuing dialogue through poetry which embodies the rhythm of life itself, reinforcing a harmony that can be founded on the restorative power of peace – shanti.

ASP & DC: Professor Fraser thank you so much for speaking to us at such length about your writings and related issues.

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*and the World of the Third. His jointly edited volume on Post-9/11 American Identity and Third World Pedagogy has come out in 2014 from Author Press, New Delhi.*

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