

The Creative Rebel

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If ever there was a maverick in Bangalore, he goes by the name of Siddhartha. He juggles quite a few hats - as a writer of non-fiction (which is often stranger than fiction), as a relentless traveller to faraway lands we can only imagine about, as a fervent lover of trees, as an ecological guru of sorts, though giving short shrift to the very concept of guru. It is difficult to slot him. Any book from such a man's pen would be a treat. Hopefully. And that hope will not be belied if you read his book, *The Birdwoman and other Creative Rebels* (Dronequill Publishers) that brings together profiles of some of the most exciting people who live on this planet. They are people like the author himself, combining creativity and rebellion in the cause of new civilisational values.

Take the title essay: the Birdwoman, who refuses to get married and dedicates her life to harbouring thousands of birds on her farm in the Thai countryside. Or the essay on Jean Zeigler, the Swiss writer and parliamentarian, who defies the entire political establishment to see that the victims of the Nazi holocaust are not cheated by Swiss banks. Or the piece on Raimundo Pamikkar, a Barcelona-based philosopher (he is half-Indian and half-Spanish) who refers to the splitting of the atom as a "cosmic abortion". There is also a moving piece on our own Asghar Ali Engineer who has had six serious attempts on his life for espousing communal harmony and religious sanity. Then there is the passionate photographer Christine Leidgens from Brussels, the city of the great singer Jacques Brel, who devotes her life in photographing communities who are struggling for their rights. Each of Christine's photographs is a poem.

The Birdwoman and other creative rebels is a book worth reading and re-reading, for it reveals a world peopled by very unusual men and women who refuse to get homogenised, who take up causes that go against the dominant strain of infotainment and shopping-mall culture and who are deeply committed to the survival of the planet and all human cultures.

Siddhartha's first book was, interestingly enough, published in France by the French publisher L'Aube. Entitled "Lettres du Ganges" it has become a cult book of sorts and enables Westerners to see India in a vibrant, prismatic and de-mystified light. For the lover of literature, it might appear unforgivable that Siddhartha spends so much time dabbling in non-literary pursuits when he should be plying his pen to enrich a genre that is gaining its lost glory by the efforts of people like him. But you got to factor in the man, Siddhartha - he is driven as much by his contradictions as by his compassion. According to him, a human being cannot escape contradictions- but alongside there should be an ongoing struggle to find a kind of aesthetic fulfilment that also incorporates concern for others and concern for the planet. But whatever be his personal whimsies the book is a great read.

This certainly is not the kind of book that Dorothy Parker quipped about: "A book that will be read long after Milton and Homer have been forgotten. And not till then." Sorry

Dorothy you couldn't have been 'wronger' if you had come by *The Bird Woman and other Creative Rebels*.

So, are we witnessing the rise of a fresh and stunning face on the horizon of Indo-Anglian writing? We will know in the weeks to come.

Book launch at the Max Mueller Bhavan, Lavelle Road, on Saturday 14th September at 6.30 pm.