

Chandani Lokuge and Chris Ringrose (eds.)

Creative Lives

Interviews with Contemporary South Asian Diaspora Writers

With a foreword by Janet Wilson

STUDIES IN WORLD LITERATURE

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Foreword

Janet Wilson

The pleasure of reading these fascinating interviews with writers and artists cannot be underestimated. The interview is a way to hear their voices in dialogue with empathetic, discerning readers and interpreters of their work. It offers a snapshot of the writers' world view as it has determined their writing and life moves, and the particular choices they have made. Such motivations towards developing a hybrid narrative voice on the part of the 18 South Asian diasporic writers who appear in this volume hinge on their decision to migrate from their homelands. Since they are exiles and migrants, their journeys are constitutive of the multidirectional trajectories comprising the many South Asian diasporas that extend across the globe: collectively the world's largest diaspora today.

This collection represents a shop-front for the work of the South Asian Diaspora Researchers' Network (SADIRN) established at Monash University, Australia in 2016. It stems from an ongoing project that involved network members and affiliates in discussion with transnational, global writers, both in Australia and beyond, and reflects the oversight and commitment of its Director Chandani Lokuge, and her co-editor of this volume, Chris Ringrose. Its range of interviews reflects SADIRN's international relations with European research groups such as that run by Frank Schulze-Engler at the University of Frankfurt and the European Association for Australian Studies (EASA). There is also its fruitful liaison with the journal *Wasafiri*, through its founding-editor Susheila Nasta, which over the last 35 years has pioneered landmark interviews with writers from "other" cultures.

Creative Lives is an illustrious extension of *Wasafiri's* tradition of fostering these literatures: it features writers who have relocated in diverse European, Australian and US centres yet retain ties with their homelands in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet. Alongside interviews with writers shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize are conversations with writers who are national and international prize-winners, or have been shortlisted for prestigious grants and awards.

In their excellent, wide-ranging introduction, Lokuge and Ringrose, who like many of the interviewees are creative writers as well as essayists, critics and scholars, draw attention to the liminality implicit in

the act of interviewing. The interviews themselves demonstrate the contrapuntal diasporic subjectivity that arises from living in two or more cultures, which is refracted in narrative practices of hybrid, transcultural, transnational writing, and the shaping discourses of movement and resettlement. The dual focus on movement to new countries like Australia, Canada, France, the UK and USA, alongside the ongoing pull of homeland issues and cultures, suggests their work may be read according to some mix of postcolonial and world literature writing categories, as proposed by Stephan Helgesson (2014), insofar as they are concerned with “local conflictual histories” and their transcultural production belongs to a “circulation phenomenon that moves across languages and literary fields” (484).

The challenges faced by these writers converge on the crux for all migrants, whether voluntary, exiled, refugee or asylum seeker: national borders, visas, entry permits, and policies of exclusion, as well as the related question of whether cultures’ “others” are perceived as located within the nation or as aliens threatening from outside. As a liminal act each one of these 18 interviews is constructed from the writer’s re-experience and recreation in words of a material reality—the vicissitudes of migration and dislocation due to political and cultural pressures, and the struggle between familial, national ties and affiliative urges—and each depends for its animation and direction on the synchronicities and affinities between interviewer and interviewee.

Creative Lives reinforces the special value of the interview at a time of devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, and by political upheavals across the globe. In this era of fake news, shrinking borders, and global uncertainty, our minds are being rewired, our antennae of curiosity and enquiry activated differently. Such reconfiguring processes and increased connectivity between people due to mobile technology— video teleconferencing services like Zoom, TV and video streaming services, and social media networking—have been reinforced by social isolation and national lockdowns. The interview format contributes to this greatly enhanced access to information that enables us, as readers, consumers, and co-producers of knowledge, to choose how to think more critically.

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Introduction

The Act of Inter-viewing: A Network of Creative Lives in the South Asian Diaspora

Chandani Lokuge and Chris Ringrose

What is more important in a network than the interstitial relations? What Hannah Arendt called human “inter-est”, that which is between people and brings them together.
(Bhabha 2015)

An “interview” is a pragmatic way into new knowledge but is also suggestive of subtle undertones and interpretations of what is already known and familiar. On the one hand, it is an interrogation or conversation that brings together one individual, the interviewee, and another, the interviewer, who shares their world. In the act of the interview, the individual sees themselves in relation to and separate from the other—who represents the public beyond their own world. When split with a hyphen, as we have chosen to do here, “inter-view” suggests something more introspective and liminal: looking inward or in-between. The effect then could be of something unpredictable, a frisson, perhaps, created between what is said and not said, what is felt and not thought—an inward reaction that resists articulation but is important to our notions of who we are in our continual negotiations with the world.

Through the fascinating and provocative medium of the interview, *Creative Lives* brings together a cross-section of South Asian diasporic¹ Anglophone novelists, poets, playwrights and translators. Their travel lines originate from South Asia—Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Tibet. They are interwoven by their geographical positioning, as well as by aspects of pre- and postcolonial histories, cultures, religions, languages and literatures. The majority of our interviewees share

1 In the Creative Lives project, the term “diasporic” includes those who are settled outside their homeland as well those who have returned to the homeland after spending a substantial period abroad.

the legacies of British colonization; consequently, inherited local and acquired British cultures blend in them. However, they are also distinguished and differentiated by disparate features that are unique to each home culture. Their voyages out, meanwhile, extend across the globe to many different destinations in the west, ranging from Australia and Canada to France, Denmark, the UK and US. In this Introduction, we seek to situate their reflections on their creative work in the light of: the relationship between “homeland” and “hostland”; the idea of “world literature”; the resources and problematics of “Anglophone writing”; and the meaning and politics of “diaspora” itself in relation to writing.

In a classic study of diaspora, James Clifford (1994) describes diaspora as “jostling and conversing [with] terms such as border, travel, creolization, transculturation, hybridity”. All of Clifford’s terms are significant for diasporic writers and artists, since diaspora opens up new impulses and topics as they imagine their journey and dis-location. In the interviews gathered in this volume, such “jostling and conversation” is evident in the interviewees’ reaction to, and reformulation of, the terms that might define their place “in the world” as they consider, adopt or decline concepts such as transnationalism, globalization and the postcolonial.

Some commentators have expressed misgivings about diasporic writing’s capacity to deal adequately with “homelands”; usually they invoke the idea of a lack of authentic belonging. One notorious example occurred in 1996, when the Australian writer Germaine Greer attacked Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* on British TV. “I hate this book”, she said. “It’s a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible?” Mistry’s response was to call her comments “asinine” and “brainless”. This was five years after Salman Rushdie’s (1991) classic essay “Imaginary Homelands”, and two years after Homi Bhabha’s (1994) *The Location of Culture* had explored the active, dynamic process of interaction between cultural and national identities. Greer seemed to offer instead an ideal of uncontaminated purity in literary responses to a nation, which diaspora theory dissociates from as it suggests xenophobia and exclusiveness.

Today one hardly needs recourse to Homi Bhabha’s reflections on “hybridity” to celebrate the brilliant possibilities for literary production offered by intersecting realms of experience, idiom and cultural hybridity offered by migration. And of course, those literary intersections can be set in the homeland, as in Amit Chaudhuri’s recent *Friend of My Youth*, or in the

hostland, as in his earlier *Odysseus Abroad*, whose very title plays with the idea of antecedents, travel and being “abroad”. Nevertheless, Chaudhuri himself is one of those most impatient with the terminology of homelands, hostlands and diaspora. Prompted by Pavan Kumar Malreddy during his interview in this volume to reflect directly on such concepts, he responds that terms like diaspora, exile, nation and identity make his mind “fog over”.

Sehba Sarwar, born and brought up in Pakistan, and a US resident for more than three decades, is equally uncomfortable with certain kinds of familiar terminology, and relates her misgivings to the content of her work and her fascination with cross-cultural encounters. “Relationships”, she says here, “don’t need to be limited by national borders that are, in the end, temporary”. She goes on to say that the word “diaspora” itself feels remote to her: “Most people I meet and work with have a history of displacement. Ultimately, I prefer the term ‘transnational’—because I ground myself in multiple spaces, and I don’t feel the need to select only one as my ‘home’”. Michelle Cahill, an Australian-based writer who engages with a dazzling variety of locales, genres and literary affinities, takes a similar view. While acknowledging her affiliation with “those of us who have been colonized and have suffered the loss of family, of language, of community, of culture”, she is prepared to entertain the idea of having “a global voice”, having spent her formative years living in three countries and valuing a family environment that was aware of the world, through its communities, “through coloniality, through trade, through art, through different cultures and languages”. Interviewee Mridula Koshy, now residing in New Delhi after a 20-year sojourn in the US, is committed to representing the resilience of her subaltern characters: “I am interested in literature as one space in which power difference and corruption can be addressed. Good literature has always been committed to examining how we structure our lives and the ideas to which we subscribe”.

As Yoon Sun Lee (2015) emphasizes, “the diasporic imaginary rests on space: space travelled, experienced and registered as distance” (133). This spatial geography gains depth from the distinctive and idiosyncratic perceptions of the writers as they reflect on their creative worlds—their way of life, artistic concerns, core beliefs, cultural practices and importantly, their literatures—within the context of their diasporic, “returned diasporic” or “nomadic” experiences. As Turkish US diaspora cultural theorist Azade Seyhan (2000) argues, originating at border crossings, and driven by mobile subjects, diaspora narratives cannot be bound by “national borders,

language, and literary and critical traditions” (4). Rather, their creativity is inspired by the interrogation of home and belonging, transcultural connectivity, hybridity and diversity, settlement and location (xviii).

Klaus Stierstorfer and Janet Wilson (2018) note that the word “diaspora” has its “etymological origins in the Greek verb *diaspeirein*, comprising the elements *dia-*, ‘through, across’, and *-speirein*, ‘to sow or scatter seeds’” (xix). It was originally used to refer to the dispersion of the Jews after the Babylonian exile; for this reason, it carried overtones of punishment. In broader and later usage, it refers to human dissemination and scattering, and to communities dislocated from their place of origin through migration or exile, and relocated elsewhere. *Creative Lives* shines a light on the earliest and most familiar of diasporas—the forced diaspora—which, commencing from the Jewish exodus from their homelands and inability to return to them, continues to grow within the more recent, entirely new historical period of our times: in the global mass migration of people from all over the world, persecuted in their homelands, who seek asylum in new lands. In his exclusive inter-view for this book, Tamil Canadian poet Cheran gives a searing insight into his exilic suffering consciousness haunted by both his motherland being lost to him through race-persecution and his precarious position in his new home in the diaspora, where racism is rife. With his severed past informing his uncertain present, Cheran’s powerful poem “On This Street Anytime – 4” with which he ends his inter-view, is inspired by today’s “Black Lives Matter” uprising, in which he sees the image of his son transfer to that of black youths shot by armed police. With this poem, Cheran continues the inter-cultural dialogue of the forced diaspora into our time, exploring losses that can never be repaired, that instead swell mutinously in new soil:

Both of them looked exactly
like my son
Height. Beauty. Black. Brave.

Alongside the forced diaspora and the desperation implicit in much South-North movement, a massive voluntary diaspora has expanded in myriad directions in the new millennium. With intensified globalization, in which transnational and transglobal mobility has been facilitated by affordable air travel and advanced information technologies and the vast inter-

national social networks spawned by them,² the voluntary diaspora has branched out in diversity over the last 30 to 40 years. This is generally a feature of corporate neoliberalism and the import / export of labour, often for low wages. However, some beneficiaries of these new developments now have the freedom not only to return frequently to the homeland but seek third and fourth new homes outside of it. Taking these new developments in migration into account, Avtar Brah (1996) notes that today, the diasporic dream is built on “a homing desire”, the wish to construct home in the hostland, in contrast to the “desire for a homeland” left behind, a model of exile associated with the Jewish diaspora (192–93). Alongside these changes, upheavals of our time such as terrorist attacks and the Coronavirus global pandemic, and also political and socio-cultural phenomena such as “Black Lives Matter” (to which we have referred above), women’s rights, “Me Too”, and the post-truth Trump fiasco in the US, dubbed the end of democracy as we know it (Fisher 2020), have led to the proliferation of new challenges and frontiers that are already inspiring the contemporary diasporic literary consciousness into new and diverse reflections and articulations. These affiliations can be a complex matter. Shankari Chandran speaks in her inter-view of how

writing the novel [*Song of the Sun God*, set in Sri Lanka] was developmental and cathartic for me in that it helped me understand and accept so much: where I have come from (ancestrally); what I cannot have, reclaim or be; and who I am now. All of that is evolving, dynamic and imperfect but it’s mine.

Part of the complexity here comes from the fact that Chandran was born in the UK, grew up in Australia and set her first novel in Sri Lanka. Of her return to Australia after ten years’ residence in Britain (“London made me feel like my South Asian-ness was normal”), she says: “When I returned home, I felt homeless”.

Most, but not all, of the authors in *Creative Lives* write in English. The global reach and status of Anglophone writing has recently come under attack, notably by Aamir Mufti (2016) in his *Forget English!* manifesto for vernacular languages as he surveys the theorization of “world literature” and scrutinizes the continuing dominance of *English* as both a

2 Vietnamese Australian scholar Anh Nguyen (2019) has shown how diasporic communication has been transformed by social media, which have “brought new possibilities for creating and sharing histories, memories, identities, and diasporic communities, both on and offline”.

literary language and the undisputed cultural system of global capitalism. But perhaps the choice between the two is not so stark. Several writers interviewed here have been searching for ways in which to introduce other languages that may co-exist and engage with English. In her interview, the Pakistani Canadian writer Mariam Pirbhai recognizes that “multilingualism is a natural aspect of our multicultural cities, our hybrid cultures—our world. Monolingualism seems like the enforced and unnatural condition”. Her 2017 short story collection *Outside People* not only involves a diverse cast of characters (Caribbean, Maghrebi, South Asian, South-East Asian and others), but draws upon a range of languages whose interconnections and interactions are important to the fiction. In this way she hopes “to break with the implied hegemony of English as our default *lingua franca*, and focus on inter-ethnic encounters that bring to view other levels of interlingualism and multilingualism”. The celebrated translator and poet Kaiser Haq speaks from a lifetime’s experience of writing and translation at the interface of English and Bengali in Bangladesh, noting the paradox that English has gained popularity as a literary medium at the same time that “there is no officially recognized place for English in the country”.

A scrutiny of the 18 interviews included in this book shows the continued affiliation of the writers to their homelands and desire to re-engage with them from diaspora. Neel Mukherjee gives powerful expression to this impulse in his conversation with Anjali Joseph:

The only thing I can say about my continuing interest in India is that I find the country intellectually fascinating. [...] India is so plural, so shifting, so one thing and its opposite simultaneously. [...] To be an Indian [writer] is to be [supplied with] material all your life.

Samrat Upadhyay notes that despite being employed for over 20 years as an academic in the US, he continues to set all his creative work in his original homeland, Nepal. Conversely, Amit Chaudhuri, a self-proclaimed roamer and “nomad”, currently simultaneously employed in universities in India and Britain, discusses here how he returns to his homeland India from his travels, intellectually and imaginatively provoked into new ways of seeing both home and the world, writing in a mode similar to what Marcel Duchamp (1999) characterized as “infrathin”.

Thus, the original homeland thrives within the diasporic creative world and is the source of much of its energy. As one might expect, current and past military and political conflicts feature in many of the inter-views and the associated texts. Romesh Gunesequera describes how he is drawn to write about “the beautiful but fragile world” of mid-to-late 20th-century Sri Lanka while

thinking about issues we all still talk about: moving places, dislocation, migration, racism—all pressing in the 1970s and 1980s and now. But then, in 1983, Sri Lanka erupted into a violent maelstrom while I was writing a story—this changed my priorities.

Gunesequera also discusses the way his 1980 short story “The Storm Petrel” plays off nostalgic and romantic yearnings for Sri Lanka against brutality and violence. Such unease is characteristic of much Sri Lankan diasporic fiction, and informs the depiction of a “mixed” Sinhala-Tamil marriage in Rajith Savanadasa’s *Ruins*. It was, says Savanadasa, “a way for me to explore the fault lines, the divides in class, generation, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation, and the tensions caused by those divides”.

Political and revolutionary undertones also characterize the most recent work of Suneeta Peres da Costa, who was born in Sydney to parents of Goan origin. She reaches back imaginatively to the sense of melancholy, or *saudade*, in the final years of Portuguese colonialism in Angola, and the experiences of the Goan diaspora there, as one of the country’s various groups: native Angolan, Goan, Portuguese and European. She explains here that by making the protagonist’s family, who are Catholic Brahmin, “complicit in the native indentured labour economy in Angola, which itself evolved out of the Portuguese slave trade”, she was able to reveal networks of power and exploitation.

Potent, too, is the yearning of diasporic authors to immerse themselves actively in their home culture and disseminate it within the hostland and beyond. Pioneering ventures in this respect include Pakistani British novelist Rukshana Ahmed’s founding of the South Asian Diaspora Arts Archive (SADAA) and the Kali Theatre Company in London, and Sri Lankan Australian novelist Rajith Savanadasa’s introduction of the beloved ancient Sri Lankan (Sinhala) Kolam theatre tradition to Australia through his latest writing.

Of particular interest here is the impressive revisioning of the Indian classic epic *Mahabharata* entitled *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, by Indian French poet, dance producer and librettist, Karthika Nair. Predicated by the changing socio-political environment of South Asia and Europe in the new millennium, Nair contemporizes the *Mahabharata* by re-visioning its context, themes and characters. Published and performed internationally to great global acclaim, *Until the Lions* makes relevant to the here and now an ancient South Asian literary tradition that is revered by Asians. In another project of east-west connection, Nair's collaborative work *Over and Underground in Paris & Mumbai* connects the French and Indian cities through vivid streetscapes and subterranean travel on their respective metros. Nair, like Sehba Sarwar, embraces her sense of double (or even multiple) locatedness. In her interview in this volume, she says:

You know I relate to both of my countries, France and India, in the same way. I am fiercely critical of them, and of the directions they are taking, but also really grateful for the person they've made me, because both have, and also very defensive of the founding principles of both countries, principles that are laudable and vital, and were, for long, successful against all odds.

What could be the germ of inspiration behind this diasporic yearning to give such prominence to the dissemination of the homeland culture, its history, and literature? A creative work is often inspired by conflictual scenarios that the writer / creator develops in a rising narrative arc. As Samrat Upadhyay points out, his starting point for a novel is "a character in a pickle"! We could hypothesize from this that their diasporic creators are also inspired by the uneasy space or frisson that may open up through an inner awareness of (un)belonging to the majority culture, and the tensions caused by such dissonance. Can we detect this claim in the in-between spaces of the interviews? And how does it feature in the context of contemporary multi-cultures in which the minority diasporic culture might be struggling, possibly burdened with an idealized past, to adapt to the majority culture? In a relatively recent interview, Homi Bhabha (2015) provides a theoretical lens through which to interrogate this view and enhance our understanding of a complex sensibility that lies unidentified in the voluntary diasporic who seems overtly adaptable and accommodating. Bhabha contests the idea that a contemporary culture anywhere is a "seamless whole", arguing instead that it is a "misfitting apparatus" in which minority cultures with their multiple differences piece into the majority culture. Using the metaphor of the

broken vessel introduced by Walter Benjamin ([1923] 2000) in his essay “The Task of the Translator”, Bhabha argues this point with particular reference to the minoritized (diasporic) Parsi community in India that he sees as a vessel patched up of “misfitted” fragments:

[T]he pieces of a broken vessel fit together not because they are the same as each other but they fit into each other in all their differences. [...] So culture is a translational reality, and to that extent it depends upon its moving parts, its often contradictory, asymmetrical moving parts, its tensile strength. [...] the question ‘What is your cultural identity?’ is unanswerable. (2015, n.p.)

However, as our group of writers demonstrates, the result is not a “paralysing condition” for a minority diasporic community but one that offers a deeply cosmopolitan space open to “varied contingencies and interventions”. Stierstorfer and Wilson’s observation that *hope* is an essential element of the original meaning of the word “diaspora” as “the scattering of seeds” (2018, xix), applies to Bhabha’s stance that contemporary multi-cultures open up interstitial spaces from which diasporic creativity may be born and within which it may grow and bear fruit. In moments of interviewing his “nomadic” transnational roaming and its effect on his creative production, Tabish Khair offers insights into the complex and non-linear effects of travelling. Khair admits to inhabiting a kind of “intellectual exile” which can be a creative “impetus”:

[a] paradoxical state of being *in* the world and *not in* the world at the same time. I think intellectual exile enables this necessary (dis)junction of being more or less visible, and one uses it creatively in a form that can be seen as being rooted in a degree of dissatisfaction about what exists in the world.

Khair also acknowledges the ways in which a creative tradition may gain by contrapuntally borrowing from other cultures and writing across national borders.

Diasporic voices share common ground in issues relating to connectedness to the homeland. However, they also draw inspiration from world literature, which, as David Damrosch (2003) theorizes, stems from “widely disparate societies, with very different histories, frames of cultural reference and poetics” (4). It is not surprising, then, that the writers interviewed here are reinventing, appropriating, recycling and translating stories and languages as new points of contact generate cross-cultural fertilisation

and result in surprising transformations. A notable example of this is Sulari Gentill (“I’m Australian. I was born in Sri Lanka, learned to speak English in Zambia and grew up in Brisbane”), who adapts the detective fiction genre to produce a highly successful series of nine politically and historically acute crime novels set in the 1930s in Sydney, Shanghai and elsewhere. Anyone interested in the circulation, reading and rewriting of texts as part of “world literature” will find acknowledgement in these interviews of a rich and complex network of writers and material that undergirds South Asian diasporic writing. Here, forms such as the bhakti poetry of Mira Bai are cited by Suneeta Peres da Costa alongside an inspiring series of later writers from Marguerite Yourcenar to Shashi Deshpande and Perumal Murugan, as well as Ingeborg Bachmann, William H. Gass, W.G. Sebald and Eunice de Souza. Lydia Davis is discussed here, as are Roberto Bolaño, and Antonio Tabucchi. Michelle Cahill talks about her inventive “Letter to [Fernando] Pessoa”. Unexpected and creative collisions occur, such as Kaiser Haq’s homage to Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Walt Whitman—just one of the fruits of his residence in the US. Or Amit Chaudhuri’s recollections of the profound effect of his first reading of D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*. One comes away from these conversations wondering if Franco Moretti’s (2000) notion of world literature as “one and unequal” (56), where he highlights the engagements between “cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system” and the European (and Eurocentric) literary canon (58) really takes account of South Asian creativity and eclecticism, and its challenge to western canons.

The writers’ nuanced observations deepen our understanding of the interstitial diasporic creative space as being neither linear nor simple. In the interview referenced above, Bhabha reflects that diaspora is about “misfits”, and that in political terms, the “misfit” is often the minority, leading a peripheral existence, subject to the processes and practices of minoritization. Bearing testimony to this, while clichéd slogans of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism celebrate equality, overt or subtle forms of racism continue unabated in our time. The diasporic literary culture of today is charged with such realities and we each deal with them in our own way.

For instance, the British-born Indian essayist and novelist Pico Iyer (2019), one of the most celebrated citizens of the world, tells in *Autumn Light: Season of Fire and Farewells* how he is nicknamed “Isoro” or “Parasite” by the “neighborhood kids” of the village of Shikanodai in Osaka, which is currently his home (27). We may assume, that in all probability, the

nickname originated in careless adult gossip. If so, one can think of no positive synonym that could even remotely excuse this label that smacks of all things abject, such as bloodsuckers and killers of trees. In relation to the diasporic, it could only describe someone obsessively sucking up nourishment from the nurturing source and destroying it in the process. Iyer, however, laughs it off with gentle irony, and seeks to soothe reader-response by arguing that the nickname may have arisen from his difference from the Japanese cultural norm: his lack of “suit and tie employment” and the role reversal in his marital relationship, by which he assumed the more domesticated role. And yet, that Iyer considered it important enough to register the nickname so early in a book that is replete with observations of and engagement with cross-cultural pollinations, seems to suggest a deliberate if subtle form of literary activism that encourages tolerance and bridge-building—the suturing of diasporic minority-majority collisions; a form of “radical resistance”, to use Cheran’s words here. For Amit Chaudhuri, literary activism is a significant creative impetus. Chaudhuri’s inspiring idea is that however difficult, the creative process must be a “state of argument [...] a dialogue not just internal, but with existing cultures [...] with your past” which then carries the potential of new perspectives that will lead us forward.

In such a dialogue, the work of South Asian diasporic writers is read in at least three contexts. As well as being part of world literature and the literature of their homelands, they are rightly seen as contributing to (as well creatively unsettling) “national” literatures in the US, UK, Canada, France and Australia.

In conclusion, *Creative Lives* projects multiple conversations between the writers, facilitating productive collaborations, augmenting communal, national and inter-national tensions and debates, but also fomenting wellbeing and harmony. They are part of a larger dialogue, too, representing minorities in conversation with the centre. It is for us as readers to pursue the somewhat under-researched form of diaspora interviews, in which writers in dialogue with critics and academics enrich our reading with brilliant new insights.

Finally, a sincere thank you to Professor Susheila Nasta for inspiring the Creative Lives interviews project at a memorable meeting of the core partners of the South Asian Diaspora International Research Network at Goethe University Frankfurt in 2017 that also included Professors Frank Schultz-Engler, Avtar Brah, Klaus Stierstorfer, Janet Wilson and Annalisa Oboe. We are

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A note on the introductions

The introductions to each of the interviews have been written by the editors in collaboration with the interviewers. Two exceptions are the interviews with Romesh Gunesequera and Neel Mukherjee, which were originally published in the journal *Wasafiri*. Here, the editors' introductions precede the original prefatory notes by the respective interviewers, Susheila Nasta and Anjali Joseph. The third is the interview with Sungchuk Kyi, for which the interviewer, Ruth Gamble, has written the introduction.

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