

view of Indian writing, Mishra says. "What in the West is taken as representative of Indian fiction as a whole is in fact a very small sample of the rich fare available in India itself." India has 16 official languages, and vigorous literary cultures exist in more than half of them. "The names of O. V. Vijayan, U. R. Ananthmurthy, and Paul Zacharia may mean nothing to readers of Indian fiction in the West, but in India they have more readers than Rushdie. And books in Malayalam outsell books in English by as much as 10 times." Vikram Seth enjoyed success with *A Suitable Boy* (1993), which "skate[s] merrily over the surfaces of its subject," describing "the shallowness of the North Indian provincial elite." Meanwhile, the name of Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, "the great chronicler of North Indian life in Hindi," remains unknown in the West.

The Indian authors writing in English are

in a very different situation from that of the Latin American stars of the 1980s. Authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa wrote their fiction in Spanish, originally with a Spanish-speaking readership in mind; only later did they address international audiences. In India, English "remains the language of power and privilege," Mishra notes. But because the audience for books in English is small, their authors "are almost forced to address a global readership." Many of these writers, including Seth, Chandra, and Mistry, choose to live abroad. This "makes for a certain kind of cosmopolitanism," Mishra observes, but "it also leads to a sameness of vision: a slickly exilic version of India, suffused with nostalgia, interwoven with myth, and often weighed down with a kind of intellectual simplicity foreign readers are rarely equipped to notice."

## OTHER NATIONS

### *Mandela's South Africa*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

Three years after the 1994 elections that marked an official end to apartheid and brought Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) to power in South Africa, euphoria has given way to worries about crime, unemployment, and other problems. South Africans, writes columnist Anthony Lewis in the *New York Times Magazine* (Mar. 23, 1997), are wondering whether Mandela, "the Great Reconciler," is also a great president.

Crime is rampant. There were 18,893 murders in 1995—which translates into a homicide rate nine times higher than the U.S. rate. Car thefts now equal nearly half the number of automobiles sold. "When one links that to the evidence that police rings are organizing car thefts, that many of the stolen cars are exported, and that 30 percent of all goods landed at Durban's port are disappearing," notes John Chettle, a Washington lawyer who formerly directed the South Africa Foundation for North and South America, "it suggests very extensive corruption among police, customs, harbor authority, and other officials." This, he adds in the *National Interest* (Spring 1997), "may be the most serious remnant of the moral corruption of apartheid, and if it is not defeated

soon the consequences could be profound." The crime and corruption, he points out, are encouraging the notion that South Africa is turning into another lawless African state with an incompetent government—and are also prompting some young professionals to leave the country.

"The apartheid system did create conditions for crime: oppressive racial discrimination, deliberate denial of decent education to blacks, miserable housing and economic policies that left millions jobless," Lewis points out. "But [Mandela] was right that the responsibility is his government's now, and its performance so far has to be judged a failure."

Nevertheless, Chettle maintains that "fears of the Africanization of South Africa are almost certainly ill-founded. The truth is that, despite its problems, South Africa is becoming a stable state, not yet akin to the social democratic states of Europe, but one with a high degree of agreement among its elites as to its political, economic, and social foundations."

It was fortunate in a way, Chettle observes, that democracy in South Africa arrived only after the statist ideologies that had sus-

tained the National Party and the ANC—apartheid and Marxism, respectively—had both been discredited. Mandela’s government embraces “prevailing Western economic views: ones that stress budgetary restraint, lowering the deficit, controlling inflation, creating an environment friendly to business, cutting regulation, and—most remarkable of all in a party that in its freedom charter pledged to nationalize the commanding heights of the economy—moving toward dismantling state monopolies and selling off their assets.” Inflation dropped to seven percent last year, the lowest figure in a quarter-century.

Reducing poverty is the country’s great challenge, Chettle writes. Yet the economy has been growing at only about three percent a year—not enough to significantly reduce unemployment, which approaches 40 percent. “Among comparable middle-income developing countries, South Africa has one of the worst records in terms of health, education, safe water, fertility, and income inequality.” Mandela’s government hasn’t much changed that. Lewis calls gross inequality “a time bomb.” But Mandela told him: “We must not be unrealistic. We want to bring about change without any dislocation to the economy.”

Ever since he was elected president, Mandela “has treated his job as more ceremonial than executive,” note the editors of the *Economist* (Apr. 5, 1997). Seventy-nine

years old this July, Mandela has increasingly left the running of the government to deputy president Thabo Mbeki, his designated political heir. Mandela’s term ends in 1999.

Mandela’s shortcomings as chief executive, Lewis concludes, are dwarfed by his achievements in the last three years. “He has taken a country utterly divided by race and made it one where people of different races actually share a vision: where ‘the two worlds have begun to overlap.’ . . . He has transformed the political system without creating unrealistic expectations in the newly enfranchised. He has taken a country where fear was everywhere and made it free. He has given a society marked by official murder a culture of human rights.” A new constitution and bill of rights are now in place.

Despite its serious problems, Chettle says, South Africa “is *not* a typical African state. That is true not only in terms of its infrastructure—an extensive financial, educational, and industrial base, and good communications and roads systems—but also its history. For well over a century the country, or its constituent parts before Union in 1910, has had all the institutions of democratic government. The conflict that has consumed the last half century did not concern so much the adequacy of those democratic institutions as their failure to include all the people.” The recent political reforms, Chettle says, have been “a good example of the reassuring pragmatism that has prevailed in South Africa.”

## *The Christ of Nations*

“The Catholic Church and Poland’s Return to Europe” by Timothy A. Byrnes, in *East European Quarterly* (Jan. 1997), Box 29 Regent Hall, Univ. of Colorado, Boulder, Colo. 80309.

It is hard to imagine a more Catholic country than Poland. Not only does it owe its freedom in part to the boldness of Pope John Paul II but the church, through Primate Józef Cardinal Glemp and the other bishops, has remained actively involved in Polish politics. It now appears, however, that the church may have overplayed its hand. The ex-communist (and anticlerical) Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) now dominates the governing coalition in the Sejm (parliament), and the SLD’s Aleksander Kwasniewski overcame the church’s open opposition to defeat Lech Walesa in the 1995 presidential election. Last year, despite strong church

protests, President Kwasniewski signed into law a liberalized abortion measure. Surveys show that a majority of Poles consistently dissent from the church’s stand against abortion, and 75 percent think that the church should stay out of politics.

“Why does the church continue to assert itself so aggressively in Polish politics?” asks Byrnes, a political scientist at Colgate University. The answer, he contends, is that it is looking far beyond Polish politics to “the future shape of European society.”

During Poland’s agony of the last two centuries—its history of partition, occupation, and foreign domination—the Catholic