

EDITED BY
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THE ROUTLEDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

ROUTLEDGE



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a spectacular destiny. After the Kalinga war, Asoca's frailty beneath the tough veneer of a king captures his predicament before he finally embraces Buddhism. Sealy resurrects him as a contemporary man creating parallels of his administration to the present bureaucracy, but Sealy's readers rejoice in this secular sutra that dazzles the way with its narratorial intersections of history, literature, and philosophy.

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NIDHI SHARMA

SELECTED POEMS by Dom Moraes

Dom Moraes' *Selected Poems* edited with an Introduction and Notes by Ranjit Hoskote is the first annotated critical edition of Moraes' work. Bringing to readers a thoughtful and nuanced selection of eighty poems from his nine poetry volumes – *A Beginning* (1957), *Poems* (1960), *John Nobody* (1965), *Beldam Etcetera* (1966), *Collected Poems* (1987), *Serendip* (1990), *In Cinnamon Shade* (2001), *Typed with One Finger* (2003), and *New Poems* (2003–2004), the book spans Moraes' vibrant writing life of almost half a decade. Hoskote's lengthy literary biography of Moraes is insightful and meticulous and, along with his detailed notes on the included poems, offers a valuable guide to readers for navigating Moraes' poetry and situating him in the contemporary light.

In his introduction to the book, Hoskote sets out to make certain significant revisions in the understanding and reception of Dom Moraes in the Indian English literary scene. Challenging the accepted image of Moraes as the Romantic and bohemian figure projected in the poetry of his early youth, Hoskote attempts to draw attention to the mature Moraes – his strong realism, his committed engagement with the world's follies as a war correspondent, and his faith in poetry as a possible antidote to hatred and violence. Hoskote also endeavors to bring out the many traits in Moraes' dynamic personality that texture his poetry with an emotional intensity that can be arrived at only by embracing the world in its fullness. Through his well-researched information on the significant events of Moraes' life, Hoskote also offers a corrective to several factual errors of detail, chronology, and inference that have characterized the available information on Moraes so far. Most importantly, Hoskote asserts, with reason and proof, that the seventeen-year lull between 1966 and 1983 in Moraes' poetic life was a period of preparation for creative germination rather than a phase of aridity, barrenness, and estrangement from the Muse.

Hoskote's selection of poems is undertaken with a keen eye on the depth of ideas, emotional honesty, music, experimentation, and philosophical vitality. Reflecting the best of Moraes' oeuvre in its wide thematic, linguistic, and stylistic range, the selection affords an opportunity to carry out a diachronic analysis of Moraes' work and his shifting perspectives on life, value, and art. The poetic themes are diverse – family, relationships, places, landscapes, autobiographical

reflections, psychological conflicts, love, modernity, politics, injustices, absences, and death. The erotic looms large in Moraes' poetic universe, manifesting itself as an elevated plane of experience and a mode of inquiry into the more prosaic facets of life. Moraes' allusions and images are often very private and a lack of access to facts can rob his poems of much of their impact. Here, Hoskote's notes come forward to contextualize the poems with adequate biographical and interpretative cues, enabling uninitiated readers to find meaning and resonance. Moraes' language, however, has a surgical sharpness that helps allay his allusive obscurity. His diction is terse, clipped, and very modern in its preference for the ordinary over the ornate. There is in him, the journalist's analytic urge to observe and record with the greatest economy of expression so that even confessions and autobiographical expressions become shorthand documents of detached and objective self-analysis.

Evident also, in these poems is Moraes' cosmopolitan ability to find a place everywhere and his utter inability to call any place home. As a world wanderer, Moraes was rich in geographical and human connections, but he was unable to anchor himself anywhere. Poetry alone, in its presence and absence, remained a steadfast space for expression, companionship and healing. And yet, his deepest self-revelations are not made without irony, a large part of which comes from his ability to detach himself as an observer from himself. This sense of detachment comes not from being a misfit within a half-understood culture but from being an existentialist in the quest of final truths. Moraes' marginal cultural location enabled him to anticipate an existential stance that, beyond ties of territory, language, culture or blood, avowed one attachment alone – to the human.

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BASUDHARA ROY

SELECTED POEMS by Jayanta Mahapatra

Jayanta Mahapatra has won several poetry prizes within India and abroad. In this collection titled *Selected Poems* published in 1987, which is his tenth volume of verse, Mahapatra brings together his best work from earlier collections, choosing the poems representative of his work till the date of its publication. When exposed to poems such as "Hunger," "Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore," and "Dawn at Puri," one effortlessly comprehends that despite having a quiet, unassuming voice, his arresting eye seamlessly shifts across contexts. At the core of the volume, there is something deeply and essentially Indian – whether he writes about poverty or a religious ritual – which, more than personal experience, comes from observation. At the same time, the poems arouse a never-ending curiosity that keeps one engrossed and wondering what will turn up in the next phrase.

The collection contains several poems from *Rain of Rites* (1976) including "Hunger," "A Summer Poem," and "Myth" in which he writes about "soughing of the sombre wind,"