

An Evening of Bright Words: South Asian Reading

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On November 16th, UCFV hosted the last of its reading series for this semester. We heard writer-in-residence Richard Van Camp, poet Roo Borson, and novelist Eden Robinson read some of their work and had two nights looking at specific groups of writers in Abbotsford, an afternoon reading of Mennonite writers from the valley and an evening reading of work by four writers of South Asian descent.

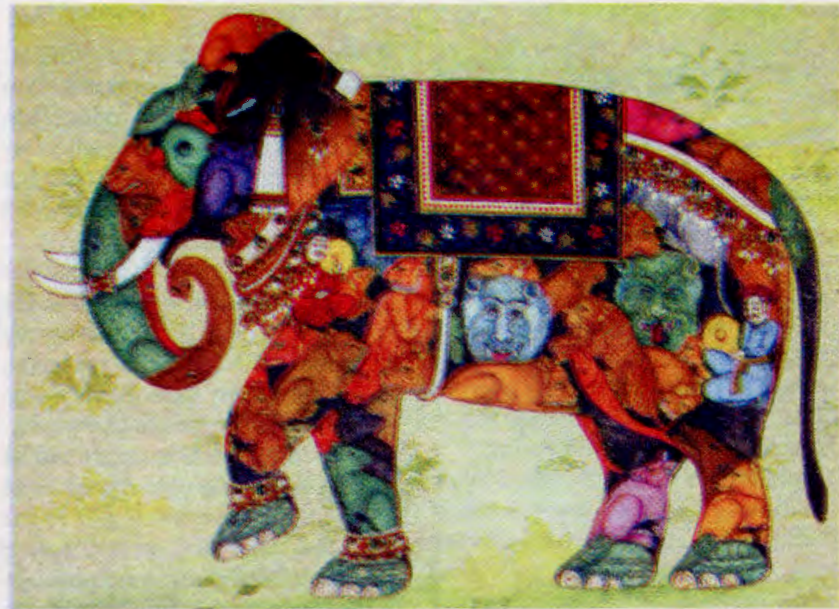
It was a cold night, and a Friday, but there was still a good turnout and we all settled in to listen to a marvelous recital by four authors.

First was Kuldip Gill who read, with a very soft voice, her lovely, passionate poetry. It was easy to be carried away with her words, each poem showing a part of her life as part of an immigrant family growing up in Mission. Kuldip says that she "found it hard to find a way to write without talking about people in my midst and the chance of hurting people. Poetry was a form that allowed me to disclose little bits through metaphor without relying too much on explicit narrative. I struggle with how to say certain things, and poetry lets me express it. It's very forgiving." Harbour Publishing, a group which focuses on small communities such as Mission, published her collection "Dharma Rasa" in 1999. She is a professional anthropologist with a Master of Fine Arts from UBC and has been published in other magazines such as the "Literary

Review of Canada" and "Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets." Also published in "Red Silk" and reading her work was Sonnet L'Abbé.

L'Abbé has two poetry anthologies of her own published, "A Strange Relief" (2001) and "Killarnoe" (2007). She writes about a variety of subjects, such as growing up with a mixed background family, and confronts how we perceive our linguistic world with playful pieces exploring the semantics of words and sounds. Her wordplay was absolutely dazzling when read aloud and the listeners tumbled along to the clever rhythms and cadence in her voice. L'Abbé has travelled internationally and draws from a number of cultures in her work where she explores what sounds mean to cultures, and how and why some sounds seem to mean the same thing across the world. She has studied around the world, taught at universities in Korea and Toronto, and now is working on her PhD in English at UBC.

Summer Pervéz was next, and she is a teacher now in UCFV's English department. Her focus is on contemporary literature and film of British South Asia. She has only started writing poetry on a regular basis lately and still insisted that she was not a writer – but after hearing her work, I would disagree; if the previous two ladies were passionate, Pervéz was on fire! She is enjoying teaching at UCFV, especially since we have a well-established South Asian population in the community and a cen-



tre for Indo-Canadian studies in the school "Teaching South Asian students was a major attraction for me," she says, "and being part of a Punjabi community was another." Where Pervéz is from is a tough question for her because she has lived in so many different places and been influenced by many different cultures; however, she says "I like to view my displacement as advantageous, for it allows me to be a multiplicity in terms of my identity." I would say she's carving herself an identity here already.

Last was the only prose author, and the only male, Tariq Malik. He was born and raised in Pakistan and became an industrial quality manager there before he emigrated. He has a book published now called "Rainsongs of Kotli" which was short-listed for the North Shore Book Festival in 2006. "Rainsongs of Kotli" looks at the ups and downs of the lives of the

central characters, loosely based off of his own family and friends' experiences, in five short stories. The common theme that seems to tie them all together is water, in all its various manifestations, so one can see why Malik likes living in Vancouver where he can wander into the bush and spend time next to a stream, contemplating it.

This was a shining way to end the writers' series at UCFV on a cold almost-winter night. Many of the faces were familiar, though a few were new, and Richard Van Camp acted as a master of ceremonies, introducing the writers and getting the crowd excited about it through his exuberance and sincere admiration of their wonderful work. These readings were sponsored by the Canada Council and were hosted in the UCFV Centre for Indo-Canadian studies.