

# Wasafiri

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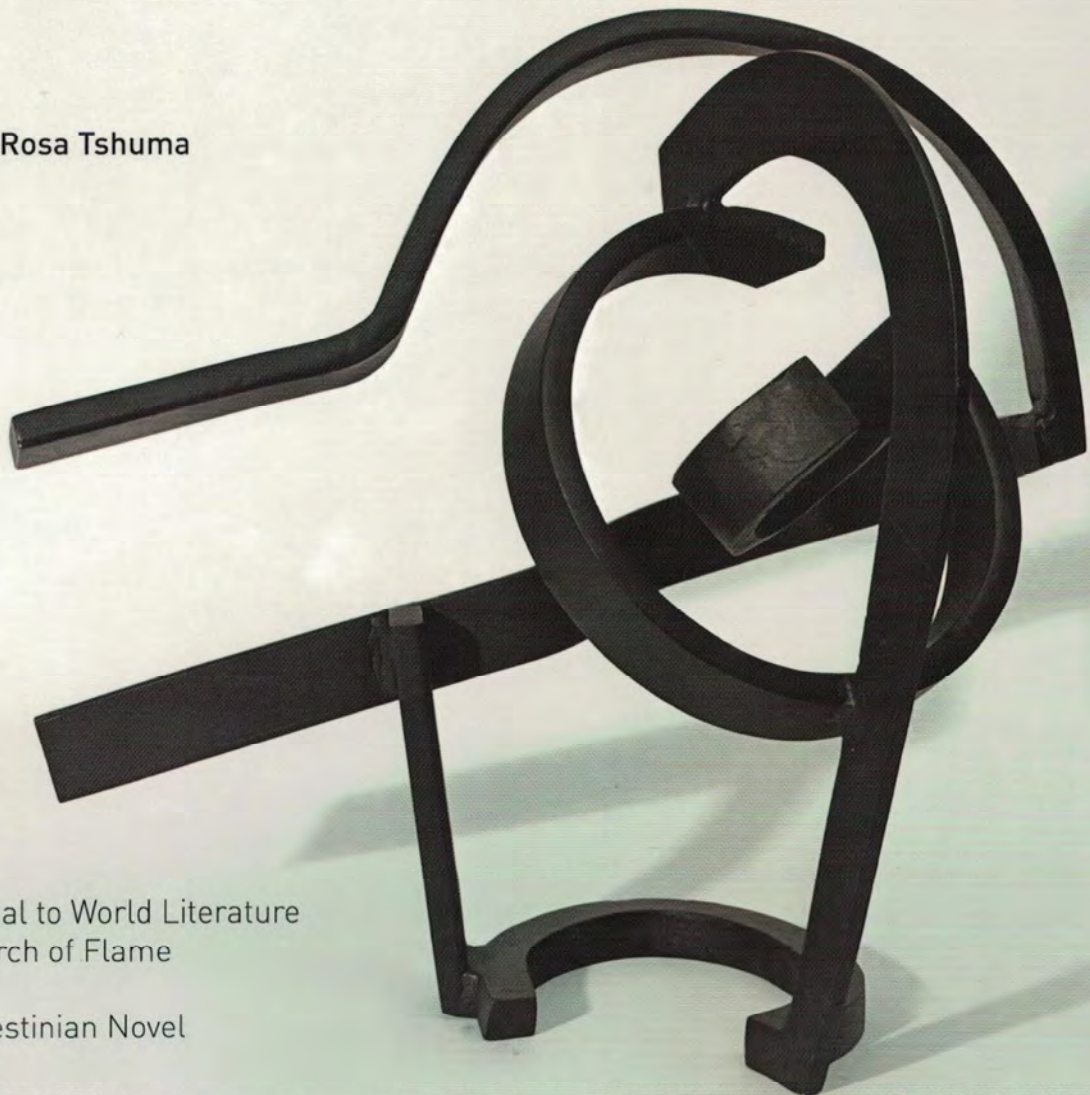
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the modes of publishing that enabled dissemination of his writing.

Nerlekar's competent handling of the case study within a wider context hinges partly on her astute choice of poet: Kolatkar was winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1977 and the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2005; more importantly, he exemplifies the 'multivocational poet' of the period,

who as a poet wrote the poem, as a publisher generated the space for it to appear, and as an editor invented the readers for the new departure and created the conditions necessary for that poem's dissemination.

Nerlekar thus sets herself the task of examining these diverse aspects of his output. Furthermore, she is acutely aware that Kolatkar is situated in a liminal time and space, when Indian writers derived as much inspiration from cultures of the past as from elsewhere. Hence, Bombay modern poets such as Kolatkar saw no contradiction in seeking inspiration as much from the bhakti saint-poets of medieval India (they were drawn to bhakti poets' anti-classical language and formal innovations rather than their devotional themes) as from the Beat poets of post-war USA. Allen Ginsberg's meaningful interactions with the Bombay poets are read as 'circuits of the global' that 'invariably lead to the space of the local'. Nerlekar's take on questions of influence and inspiration is postmodernist; rather than considering the work of Bombay modern poets derivative in any manner, she recognises multiple modernisms: the criss-crossing of local and global pathways.

Nerlekar fleetingly uses the term 'Bombay's geomodernisms'. She could have reflected – even if briefly – on how literary modernisms rooted in Bombay related to modernism in other creative forms such as visual art, film and performance. After all, the beginning of her *satthotari* period (1955) is less than a decade after the Progressive Artists' Group was founded in Bombay (1947). Given the already ambitious scope of her project, this was perhaps not feasible and is a negligible gripe. Indeed, that such a

demanding book manages to be academically sound and gratifyingly accessible is a testament to Nerlekar's considerable abilities in research, writing, bilingualism and interpretation. It is important to note that Nerlekar is bilingual herself; this allows her to read Kolatkar's oeuvre in Marathi and English, highlighting the interconnections, synergies and distinctions between the poet's output in both languages.

In her close reading of Kolatkar's poetry (especially *Jejuri* and *Bhijaki Vahi*, which won him the Commonwealth and Sahitya Akademi distinctions respectively), Nerlekar offers penetrating and frequently poignant interpretations. When exploring the distinctions between third-party translation and authorial/poetic bilingualism, she questions the efficacy of the term 'translation', proposing to nuance it further with the related terms 'self-translation' and 'transcreation', so as to more accurately capture the creative practice of bilingual poets such as Kolatkar who often write distinct yet equivalent texts in different languages. As she avers, 'Kolatkar's writing, sometimes simultaneous bilingual transcreation, sometimes translation, could be seen as a way [...] of questioning theories of origin, of interrogating authority by instigating [...] mobility across linguistic lines.' At all times, Nerlekar demonstrates reflexivity, sidestepping facile cosmopolitanisms and avoiding shortcuts in her study of a poet whose work drew inspiration from diverse cultures and was indeed enriched by his many vocations — as editor, publisher, poet and perhaps even as advertising creative. Yet Nerlekar does not consider Kolatkar's creative practice as one of mere conceptual or multimedia bricolage. She delves into poetic agency, ways of 'creating', in its many dimensions: making, thinking, seeing and reading. Interpreting some of Kolatkar's poetry, wherein we see him question the futility of the poetic act in effecting sociopolitical change, Nerlekar even reflects on the paradoxes of representation itself, whether textual and/or visual. Indeed, perhaps the multi-vocational nature of Kolatkar's output is born out of his frustration with the limitations of representation.

*Bombay Modern's* analysis of Kolatkar's work is comprehensive, rich and insightful; it throws open a window into much wider worlds, those of Dalit activism, the cultural sociopolitics of mono-, bi- and multilingualism, literary modernism both in India and abroad, the relationship between word and image, the creative process and the pragmatics of publishing little magazines and small press books. Reviewing it is a frustratingly reductionist exercise. Through its many compelling explorations – historical, formal, material and linguistic – '*Bombay Modern* asks for an expanded ring of interpretation' and a richer, multilingual vision of literary history. This book is highly recommended to readers interested in India's modern literatures, poetry, translation practices, the culture of Bombay and, by extension, the multilingual fabric of India's national, regional and local cultures.

**Patricia Duffaud**

**Iranian Cinema  
Uncensored**

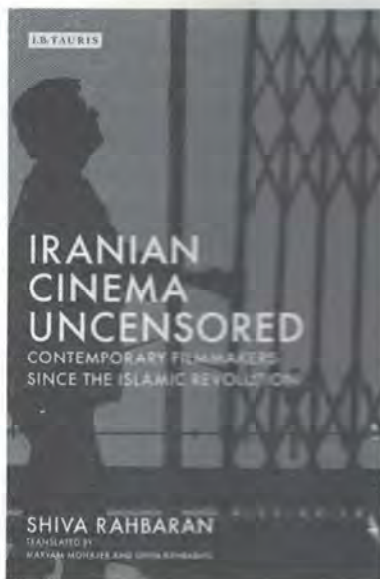
*Shiva Rahbaran*

*I B Tauris, London, 2016, pb*  
336pp ISBN 9781784534189 £17.99  
[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)

Shiva Rahbaran looks at New Iranian Cinema after the Iranian Revolution and its influence on post-revolutionary society. Between 2007 and 2011, she interviewed ten film-makers and an important figure in Iranian cinema. Rahbaran asked all interviewees the same questions, which gives the reader points of comparison and an extensive understanding of the effect of the Iranian Revolution on New Iranian Cinema.

The first interview is with Mohammad Beheshti, previously head of the Farabi Cinema Foundation, an important body in the Iranian film industry created in 1982. He believes that the organisation was a successful mediator between a restrictive government and Iranian film-makers. Beheshti states that the Hollywood machine is itself a censor: 'Even in France, where the government hugely subsidizes the film industry, it is





exquisite film *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, explains how hard he fights to make a film. He often mentions the scripts that were banned, the projects that did not receive funding, the lost possibilities. His work suffers from the delays imposed on him, and one feels that the films he could have made are as real to him, and better, than those he managed to make under these adverse conditions.

Abbas Kiarostami also states that the Iranian Revolution delayed the growth of Iranian cinema: Rahbaran reports him as saying that 'Iranian art cinema grew *despite* and not because of post-revolutionary censorship, nepotism and dogmatism' (60). However, Bahman Farmanara recalls a time, before the Revolution, when the owners of cinemas imposed a form of censorship by refusing to show art-house films, because they were not a good business proposition. Majid Majidi concurs.

Many such views clash or complement each other, like the facets of something too big for one film-maker to see in its entirety. What is certain is that the Islamic regime exerted its censorship in many ways. It stopped Film Farsi, it attempted to train its own breed of pro-revolutionary film-makers (some of whom are very good) and it punished others, imprisoning them or making it harder for them to make films.

Another area explored by Rahbaran is the duty of these film-makers towards society. Do they feel the need to educate their audiences? And who are these viewers? The fact that Western film festivals often show Iranian films means that some accuse others of catering to a Western audience. Ebrahim Hatamikia, for instance, calls Kiarostami 'the darling of international film festivals'. For Hatamikia, 'these festivals have ruined our nature, our style and our taste, just like a destructive virus' (217).

One can only imagine Tahmineh Milani's shudder when the interviewer suggests that she has been labelled a 'festival director', favoured by Westerners who wish to see 'backward' Third World countries. She answers: 'No. They don't label me in that way. I'm different from that lot' (192).

*Iranian Cinema Uncensored* gives readers a valuable sense of what these

personalities of New Iranian Cinema are like. For instance, Kiarostami was reluctant to be interviewed. He refused to be recorded and even suggested answering each question with a different photograph. He distrusted 'words as a means of expressing the truth' (62). This is very apt from the creator of such elegant films. In contrast, Hatamikia comes across as grounded in the reality of war when he repeats his intent of confronting Iranian society with the Iran-Iraq war. He saw it first-hand and does not want the war veterans, whose experience he shared, to be forgotten. The last chapter gives us an amusing insight into Rahbaran's encounters during her work on this project. She describes her failure to be granted an interview by difficult filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, an autodidact who seems to exercise total control over his cult-like family.

As an undercurrent, a love of Iran shines through the book. The film-makers, at the time of the interviews, had chosen to remain in Iran despite the great restrictions placed on them and, for some, in spite of the danger. Iran is a country of great beauty, as viewers of Iranian films are aware: it is in the poetic shots of Kiarostami, the villages of Dariush Mehrjui and the glossy city of Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven*. This disparate and talented group of people share a love for their country and its culture and a feeling of responsibility towards their society, which are captured well in this book.

Fathima M.

### Desi Girls: Stories by Women Abroad

Edited by Divya Mathur

Hoperoad, London, 2015, pb  
312pp ISBN 9781908446442 £8.99  
www.hoperoadpublishing.com

### The Lovers & the Leavers

Abeer Y Hoque

Fourth Estate, London, 2015, hb  
237pp ISBN 9789351772095 £9.99  
www.harpercollins.com

Hollywood that determines what is shown and for how long' (18).

He explains that after the revolution, Iran restricted the import of Hollywood films to protect its cinema, which was, at the time, a 'sapling'. This helped Iranian cinema find itself. The government also banned anything to do with 'Film Farsi' the melodramatic genre which had been popular before the revolution. Incredibly, Beheshti says they stopped the famous Film Farsi actor Mohammad Ali Fardin from acting again, even in other genres, as he would have reminded audiences of the decadent lifestyle of his previous films. Also fascinating is Beheshti's view of the enforced wearing of the hijab for women on screen. According to him, it took some time for film-makers to change the way they saw women. To start with, they were angry that they could not portray them beyond common sexual objectification and were unable to see them in a different way for years.

Other interviewees challenge Beheshti's assertions. For Bahram Beyzaie, the Iranian Revolution had a negative effect on Iranian cinema. He expresses this vehemently: 'I repeat: it is a shameless lie to say that New Iranian Cinema is a product of the revolution' (34) and 'I repeat again and again that new Iranian Cinema started in the 1950s and 1960s, before the Islamic Revolution. It was halted for a while after the Revolution' (54).

Beyzaie, who had to wait almost five years to be allowed to show his

The act of writing can be liberating for those who seek solace from