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Interview with Anoop Chandola

THE INTERVIEW

Anoop Chandola

HOW TO CITE

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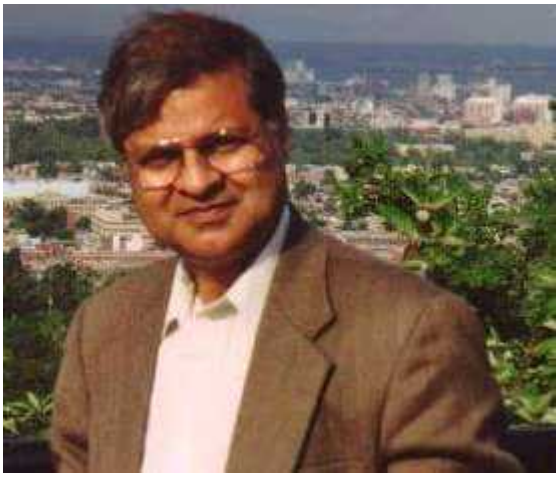
(Anoop Chandola's novels are radically innovative in form and contents, with a new philosophy. This is because he is a linguist-anthropologist who has taught literature and philosophy, too, among other things. He has his own linguistic theory as presented in his book "Situation to Sentence" (AMS Press, New York, 1979). He named a new interdisciplinary field of music and linguistics as "musicolinguistics." His book "Folk Drumming in the Himalayas: A Linguistic Approach to Music" (AMS Press, 1977), a research supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation, laid down a solid foundation of this field. Later another book "Music as Speech: An Ethnomusicolinguistic Study of India" (Navrang, New Delhi 1988) and several articles published internationally by him advanced the field as "ethnomusicolinguistics" under ethnomusicolgy. In his book "A Systematic Translation of Hindi-Urdu into English" (University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1971), he has introduced a new logic-based system of translation. His book "The Way to True Worship: A Popular Story of Hinduism" (University Press of America, Lanham, New York, London, 1991) is his anthropological contribution to the study of religion. But his most important original research is "Contactics," a new social-behavioral science of human contact with its adjunct philosophy "Contactism." Several articles and a book "Contactics: The Daily Drama of Human Contact" (University Press of America, 1992) by him present this research in technical detail. For its popular use, his novel "Discovering Brides" is noteworthy. In addition to his regular appointment as a professor of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona, he has been a visiting faculty member at the University of California at Berkeley, University of Washington, University of Wisconsin at Madison, and University of Texas at Austin. He is a member of several scholarly organizations.

His book The Second Highest World War: The Rama Theater (iUniverse, 2002), won rave reviews in our journal. Naturally we couldn't contain our desire to know more about him. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month. Some excerpts...)

Qu.1. Why did you start writing novels now? Was it your secondary interest in life?

Ans. Actually, writing fiction should have been my first interest. In India, I graduated with university degrees in Sanskrit, English, and Hindi literature. But as a research university teacher in America, I had to focus on research to advance my career. So, except two recent novels, my eight books and over forty articles are very specialized in subject matter.

Anoop Chandola



Anoop Chandola, born in India, is a professor of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona. His degrees in linguistics include an M.A. from the University of California (Berkeley) and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is the author of 10 books including a novel, *Discovering Brides*

Qu.2. Could you tell us about your educational background?

Ans. I am a native of Garhwal (Uttaranchal). My education up to high school is from the Messmore Intermediate College of Pauri. After completing one year of my intermediate education at this Christian school, I joined the D.A.V. College of Lucknow for my second and last year of intermediate. My B.A. is from the University of Allahabad and M.A. from the University of Lucknow. After teaching for a total of three years at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University and the M.S. University of Baroda, I came to the U.S.A. in 1959 on a research assistantship and scholarship with a travel grant to study linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. I had already received some elementary education in this new social behavioral science by attending the Indian School of Linguistics at the Deccan College of Pune, where the School started first. My two degrees in linguistics include an M.A. from the University of California at Berkeley and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Linguistics is also a part of anthropology, and thus started my interest in verbal and nonverbal social-cultural behavior. So you can see why my novels are literary as well as ethnographic or anthropological.

Qu.3. What is an ethnographic or anthropological novel?

Ans. Ethnographic or anthropological novels make a new genre, not known well yet. Such a novel contains a people's story with a focus on their ethnicity, culture, and environment as observed or experienced by the author. But my novels are more than anthropological in the sense that they go beyond culture. Culture implies people living with certain sets of "shared" beliefs, values,

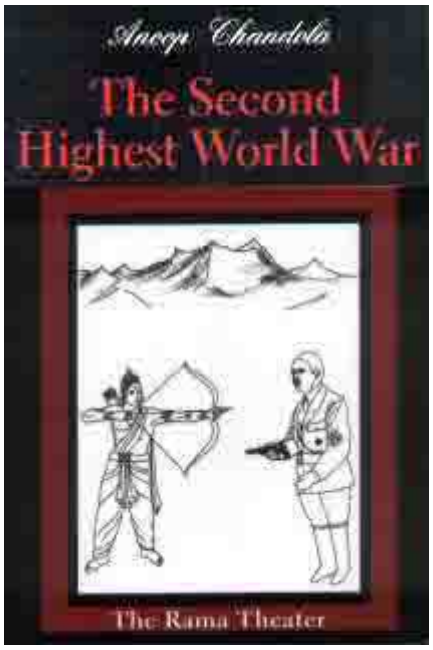
expressions, actions, materials etc. I have used my behavioral theory of Contactics in "Discovering Brides" to show that a consistent behavior or sharedness is not possible in real life.

Qu.4. We have multiple and positive reviews of your novel "The Second Highest World War: The Rama Theater" (iUniverse, 2002) in our Journal. Your other novel "Discovering Brides" (iUniverse, 2000) is slated to be reviewed in our next issue. How did you write them?

Ans. I thank you and the reviewers very much. Here I will give you very short and simple stories underlying the long and dramatic stories of these novels. My lawyer son, Varn, was born and raised in the U.S.A. In America, the Indian American child is called an ABCD or "American born confused desi." The parents are more responsible for creating the confusion! My wife and I are vegetarians even though our brahmin parents were not! Varn, who is an atheist Gandhian vegetarian lawyer, wanted just a vegetarian bride irrespective of her religion, ethnicity or national origin. Varn's mother, Sudha, became more and more depressed. She was teaching at the university only part-time. So she spent a lot of her time in matrimonial communication, but no results. We found that there were other Indian American parents, too, who had experienced bride search more like a depression! Thus the treatment of this topic personally and culturally became very compelling and so I started "Discovering Brides" with my semi-autobiographical stories. It really turned out to be a therapy for us (and many other friends felt likewise). The second novel "The Second Highest World War: The Rama Theater" has been my long time dream. My father was a soldier in WWII. I used to regularly watch the Ram Lila during the War years, as there were no movie theaters yet in my hometown. I very strongly maintain that the Allies couldn't have won the War without India. The bravery of Indian soldiers is evident by their overwhelming number of the Victoria Cross medals. So symbolically Lord Rama is shown fighting Hitler on the front cover of this novel. The mountains on the cover, with the picture of the Chaukhamba range as seen from Pauri, represent India's higher role that has been grossly ignored in the West. For example, here in America I have seen some movies related to WWII, but no credit to India seen in them.

Qu.5. Is there any talk to make a movie based on this War novel? If someone should be interested in it for a movie, what would be your answer?

The book by Chandola. Click on the book to go to its review



Ans. No such talk yet. The novel has come out only a few months ago. But many friends feel that this novel is worth a movie. I would say "yes" whenever an offer comes. In fact, this novel has the potential of two films. One is the "memoirs" of the young boy. And the other is the Hindi folk stage play of the Ramayana, known as the Ram Lila. To observe people's dramatic verbal and nonverbal actions from the standpoint of a young boy is not commonly found in literature. Then the Ramayana story is the second longest epic of India and the third longest of the world. The Mahabharata, which is the longest epic story of the world, has been filmed in English as a Broadway play by Peter Brook. Now is the time for the Ramayana's modern story as the Rama Lila or the Rama Drama. You know, no other story can match its popularity as it is completed in 10 days or nights during the Dashhara holidays. I have presented the Hindi Ram Lila in this novel with its first full translation. Its conversion into a screenplay should be very easy now.

Qu.6. Your favorite movie?

Ans. "Gandhi."

Qu.7. Are you writing another novel?

Ans. I have a strong desire to write my third novel about a priestly person's multiple personalities. But I have written a few pages so far.

Qu.8. What do you like most? And what is your second favorite activity besides writing?

Ans. Writing is what I like most. Yoga is my second favorite activity and I attribute my good health to its regular practice.

Qu.9. What do you do in your spare time? Your hobbies? Ans. I watch TV a lot, mostly news, music and educational programs.

Qu.10. What do you consider as your biggest achievement in life?

> *...It's hard to say which one is my biggest achievement. But as a researcher, I consider "contactics" and "contactism" as my most important contributions. Contactics is the behavioral science of human "contact." The philosophy of human "contact" is contactism. We need it for world peace and fairness in our human contact. You will find more about them in my novel "Discovering Brides."...*

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Qu.11. What is one of your biggest disappointments?

Ans. As an anthropologist, I want to see human unity. But this is not happening. For example, terrorists' attack on America on September 11, 2001 and recent riots by religious fanatics in Gujarat tell me that we have failed to educate younger generations about our fundamental human unity, which has been shown by scientific researches. Scientific and secular education, not religious education, is what we need everywhere at the primary and secondary levels. My disappointment about religion is echoed by a soldier in my novel "The Second Highest World War: The Rama Theater." It goes like this: "Religions are like mosquitoes that sing sweetly and suck out humanity or inject mass fatal hate."

Qu.12. If you were able to choose your profession again, what it would be, and why?

Ans. The Indian Film Institute was just coming new at Pune where I was studying linguistics at Deccan College during the summer of 1956. I thought of leaving my teaching job at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University and join the Institute as a student the next year. I had no idea at that time that I would be preparing for America a year later at the M.S. University of Baroda. I would have liked to become a film director. Satyajit Ray had already shown us the way to produce outstanding movies, especially the ones based on literary novels. In other words, my love for literary writing or performance would have been satisfied if I had chosen a film career. I have tremendous respect for Indian and American film industries because they try to represent the ideal of human unity. In them we notice human diversity at all work levels. You will find this view expressed in "Discovering Brides."

Qu.13. What do you love most in America?

Ans. Again, seeing human diversity in America. I came from India where I was already used to seeing human diversity. So many ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, foods, costumes, climates, and what have you. I love the fact that America is not one thing, one person, one group, one face, one view, one book, one past.

Qu.14. What do you like most in American university education?

> *...This is a myth that not everybody can be a writer. We humans are born with language centers in the brain. Whatever we think or speak in a language are known as narratives, short or long. Every narrative has a context and therefore makes a story...*

Ans. Flexibility. That is, considerable freedom for the student and teacher. As a student, you can graduate with your choice of subjects, pace, and potential. For example, you can major with a combination of astronomy and philosophy at the undergraduate level. Or you can even create your own new major combining courses from subjects you consider relatable. As a teacher, you can create a new course or combine diverse fields into one program or change your field of research altogether. Interdisciplinary focus impresses me the most in American college education.

Qu.15. What changes do you see in higher education in the next 10 or 20 years?

Ans. Fast and easy accessibility to knowledge. The high-tech revolution will globally take over education. In order to become a very sophisticated engineer, for example, a student will not necessarily have to go to a faraway costly school. His or her home and hometown college will be able to readily provide most of the latest know-how through interactive technologies. Machines will considerably minimize the need for teachers, classrooms, and libraries. Also, publishing and disseminating research through cyberspace will be more common. A new equal opportunitism, which we have been so desperately trying to achieve by social and legal reforms, will prevail in education through technological revolution.

Qu.16. What do you dislike in the U.S. A. and why?

Ans. Driving. Americans are the most compassionate people on this earth, yet they kill or hurt their people the most on their roads. America has the best roads and rules, which unfortunately lead the drivers to behavioral wilderness. Thousands are killed every year in vehicular accidents. Irresponsible road driving is America's continuing civil war, for whose end a Lincoln is not needed, for it is with no prejudice.

Qu.17. If a youngster wants to take up writing as a career what would you advise him?

Ans. Read other recognized writers' works in your favorite subjects. You do not have to necessarily emulate any great work, but try to understand what made it interesting. Nevertheless, you can be a great writer without reading a great work just as you can be a great lover without reading the Kamasutra. The rule is that you must keep writing whatever you wish to. However, a caution. Do not solely rely on writing career for livelihood.

Qu.18. Is a writer born, or can he train himself?

Ans. This is a myth that not everybody can be a writer. We humans are born with language centers in the brain. Whatever we think or speak in a language are known as narratives, short or long. Every narrative has a context and therefore makes a story. That is, everyone is naturally born with the potential of writing and can write those stories which sound interesting. Continued writing becomes training itself. Moreover, all high school or college courses automatically render writing experience. Thanks to modern high tech revolution that's making equal opportunity to writing possible and destroying the myth of gifted "born writers" or trained "creative writers." We do not need to create an artificial caste system in a natural phenomenon.

> *...A message for your readers? Well, some messages are direct in my novels. Equally important are the messages that are behind the curtain, which I have left for the readers themselves to unfold...*

Qu.19. Is attending writing workshops helpful? Did you attend any?

Ans. As I said, anyone can write. As she or he progresses in education, her or his writing skill also progresses. For example, I have to correct every student's written stuff so that her or his writing looks professional. This applies to literary writing, too. I never needed to attend any writing workshop or course in creative writing for two reasons: I teach literature and write about people. I am interested in telling or writing about how people work with things, verbally and non-verbally. By nature, I am also a part of people. So I am for natural writing; it allows me to be with people and myself, with their things and my things. Creative writing courses or workshops are good for those who want to practice writing as an art for its own sake

Qu.20. Any message for your readers?

Ans. Some messages are direct in my novels. Equally important are the messages that are behind the curtain, which I have left for the readers themselves to unfold. Sometimes some subtle literary features may not get enough attention. For example, my novel "The Second Highest World War: The Rama Theater" has a web structure: a story within a story, within a story. Then the various paradoxes of human life. An example is that Valmiki supposedly curses a hunter and then tells his story. Very much like that hunter, a drunk kills the Indian storyteller and his beautiful American wife. In the Rama Lila, however, a hunter is praised for killing a man-eater tiger. Another example is that a successful destabilization of a big country through religious terrorism, which eventually hit America on September 11 last year, can be seen first in the partition of India. The main thing to remember about my novels is that they are about a new secular and democratic globalization transcending national-cultural relativism. Rights of women and other depressed classes and opposition to ethnocentricity, religious fanaticism, and social hegemony are a few examples. More importantly, readers' views are welcome as their messages to me.

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Review of The Second Highest World War - The Rama Theatre by Anoop Chandola.

Interviews - Collective Index (Appearing in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*)

Interview appearing in next issue (Volume 2, Number 1, January - June 2003)

Interview with Margaret Stark, in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology (sister publication)* (Volume 3, Number 2, July - December 2002)

-Editor-in-Chief