

RUKMINI NAIR

Two questions

“The right to dream should be the first fundamental right” declared Mahasweta Devi, one of India’s most celebrated writers. in her Inaugural Address to the Frankfurt Book Fair, 2006. My question for our panel is: How is the ‘fundamental right to dream the other’ interpreted across cultures?

Are the limits of language the limits of our dreams, or vice versa?

CV

RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR is Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Linguistics and English at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge in 1982.

Internationally recognized for her work in the areas of linguistics, cognition and literary theory, Nair received a second *honoris causa* doctoral degree from the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in 2006. She has taught at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, the National University of Singapore and the University of Washington at Seattle, and was, most recently, Visiting Professor at the Department of English, Stanford University, in 2005-2006. In addition, she has delivered plenary addresses and invited lectures at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla as well as at many foreign universities. These include Aarhus, Berkeley, Birmingham, Cape Town, Colombo, Copenhagen, East Anglia, Emory, Hangzhou, Kula Lumpur, Linköping, Los Angeles, Portsmouth, the Max Planck Institute, Nijmegen, the Federal and Catholic Universities of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Saarbrücken, Sorbonne, SOAS, London, Toronto, Trieste and Xinxiang, China. !

Academic books by Nair include *Technobrat: Culture in a Cybernetic Classroom* (Harper Collins, 1997); *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: the Idea of Indifference* (Minnesota University Press and Oxford University Press, India, 2002); *Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture* (Oxford University Press, India, 2002 and Routledge, London and New York, 2003); as well as an edited volume, *Translation, Text and Theory: the Paradigm of India* (Sage, 2002). Nair also serves on the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Literary Semantics*, *The Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *The Journal of Pragmatics*, *Psychology and Social Practice* (an e-journal) and *Biblio*, as well as *The Macmillan Essential Dictionary*.

The year 2000 saw Nair selected as a 'Face of the Millennium' in a national survey of writers by *India Today*. From the time she won, as a student, an Essay Prize in a competition organized by *La Stampa*, *Le Monde*, *Die Welt* and *The Times* in conjunction with the 'First International Exhibition on Man & his Environment', Turin, Italy, Nair has been the recipient of several awards. Her latest award was a CRASSH fellowship (Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences) at the University of Cambridge in 2006.

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Nair, who has been called 'the first significant post-modern poet in Indian English' has published three books of poetry: *The Hyoid Bone* and *The Ayodhya Cantos* and *Yellow Hibiscus* (Penguin, 1992, 1999, 2004). In 1990, she received the first prize in the All India Poetry Society/ British Council competition and her poems have since appeared in many anthologies and been translated into languages ranging from German to Macedonian. Her contention is that she writes poetry for the same reason that she does research in cognitive linguistics - to discover the limits of language. Her great ambition is simply to continue to write, whatever the genre and whatever the odds. Married with two children, she lives in Delhi.

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