

Somdatta Mandal's Review of *A Rainbow Feast*: A Response

George Polley¹
Sapporo, Japan

In her review of *A Rainbow Feast: New Asian Short Stories*, Somdatta Mandal, Ph.D., Professor of English, Visva-Bharati University, India makes the following criticism: two of the stories should not have been included because one of the authors is not Asian, and the other is Asian by ancestry (his grandparents emigrated from India to Guyana, where the author was born and raised) thus somewhat diluting “the unique Asianness” of the book.

I've been wondering when someone would question Professor Quayum's decision to venture outside strict geographical jurisdictions of Asia. Though geographical jurisdictions have been blurred by changing boundaries, globalisation and massive migrations of Asian populations, the old jurisdictions are held as special by many of the people that live in them. Sometimes this means denying outsiders – immigrants and people whose membership is ancestral – membership because this blurs, as Professor Mandal correctly says, the “unique identity of being Asian” (or European, African, or whatever). I don't know of a place where this doesn't occur.

Professor Quayum's decision to move outside traditional geographic jurisdictions recognises something that remaining inside them does not, and that is what is an Asian short story, and who can (or ought) write them? In this case he chose a fine story by Sasenarine Persaud whose membership in the Asian community is ancestral, but who identifies himself as an Asian of Indian extraction, and sees the world from that point of view. And he chose my story about the Tokyo-based artist Seiji. I acknowledge that I “stick out like a sore thumb” both in this collection and in my neighbourhood in Sapporo, Japan. But my story is an Asian short story because it is written about a Japanese artist from that artist's point of view. To correct an error by Professor Mandal, “Seiji” is set in the decidedly urban historic Asakusa neighbourhood of Tokyo, not “in rural Japan.”

¹ Originally from the United States, George Polley and his wife moved to Sapporo, Japan, in early 2008 to be near her family. His poetry and fiction have appeared in a number of publications, including *South Dakota Review*, *Graffiti* (UK) and *The View from Here* (UK). A poetry collection, *Seeing: Collected Poems 1973-1999* appeared in 2000. Recent books include *The Old Man and the Monkey*, *Grandfather Stories* and *Grandfather and the Raven*.

Though sticking to strict geographical jurisdictions is probably the safest bet, I think taking the more “risky” one is the best bet because it expands the idea of “Asianness” and who can write creatively and sympathetically about it.

With Professor Mandal, I look forward to a second volume from Professor Quayum’s able editorial hand.