

TWENTY-TWO NEW ASIAN SHORT STORIES

edited and introduced by
MOHAMMAD A. QUAYUM



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Introduction

Asia is topographically/geographically so vast and amorphous that it is difficult to give it a shape, boundary or limit. Indeed, it is often challenging to even conceive of, or contain, it in the mind. This has led to adopting a piecemeal approach to it, thinking of it in regional sub-divisions which are equally vast and multitudinous: South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and so forth. Asia is also culturally multifaceted, protean and multifarious; polychromatic, variegated and kaleidoscopic. Home to several ancient civilisations – Mesopotamian, Indus Valley, Persian and Chinese – this is where many races, religions and languages have met and coexisted for centuries. It is the cradle of the world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and home to some of the major languages as well: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Persian, Tamil, Urdu and, more recently, English, albeit adventitiously and through a process of cultural incision and grafting. Nowadays, Asia is also transforming economically at a phenomenal pace, and pundits predict that if the present trajectory continues, by 2050 “Asia w[ill] regain the dominant economic position it held some 300 years ago, before the industrial revolution” (Asian Development Bank 1).

Given this geographical amplitude, rich history and cultural diversity, and especially the economic transformation that Asia is currently experiencing, it is undoubtedly important to see how these aspects are translating into Asian literary works; how they affect the imagination of the writers and are in turn reflected in their writings. It is also equally important to see how this changing condition, which brings with it modernisation, globalisation and technological advancement, is influencing the lifestyle of the people – their behaviour, attitude, perception of themselves and others, their traditional practices and institutions such as marriage, family, religion, and their worldview in general. What effects are the increasing urbanisation and consumerism having