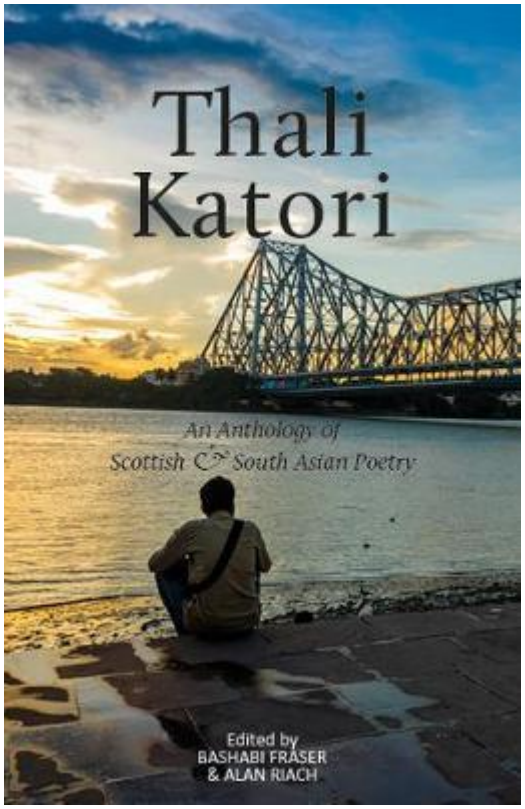
The Mohona: A Confluence Of Identity

By Bashabi Fraser



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Bangladesh.

In the UK India Year of Culture[1], we celebrate a long association between our two nations – Scotland and India — in our co-edited anthology, *Thali Katori* (2017)[2]. For me, India signifies a vast sub-continent with a shared history, a South Asia to whose shores the Scots came to administrate, do business and build their careers. One can say that a disproportionate number of Scots served as Viceroys and Governor-Generals, and were predominant in various fields like the Indian Medical Service, Indian Forestry Service, the British Indian Army and in business.

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Many of the Scots posted to India served the East India Company as surgeons, administrators and military personnel, and many of them wrote poetry, publishing in local journals. They are known as the Company Poets. They were dismissed at 'home' as amateurish, but some were slowly taken seriously in literary circles. With the implementation of Macaulay's (a Scot) *Minute on Education* in 1835, English was introduced as a language in schools and higher education to produce a tribe of brown sahibs who took up subordinate administrative and professional jobs which helped the governance of British India. English remains a thread that connects the two countries today.

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She recalls hoopoos on the maidan, flashes of minivet, oriol and bulbul peering through the flowers. She can hear the bargaining in the bazaar in ‘abundant India’. In ‘My Indian Self’ she affirms:

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For Tessa, the elsewhere is India, and it stays with her and is part of her, her joyous present. Jane Bhandari too remembers the child who was the wanderer, who ‘went far away, / But always returned to the memory of blue’ … the blue of Indian skies? The blue of the ocean crossed?

We are all, to extend Salman Rushdie's description, post-midnight's children. Valerie Gillies went to India to do her Masters at Mysore University as a Commonwealth Scholar. In 'Fellow Passenger', she zooms through South India with the diamond buyer and the Anglo Indian whose 'own sounds were pidgin' but who played 'that tune of "Beautiful Dreamer"' on the monsoon-warped instrument that he restored in 'The Piano-tuner' — one who had come some two hundred miles to tune a relic of imperial time, while he himself was a relic of the same era.

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The Scottish-Indian encounter and association embodies a Mohona, a confluence where the sea and river, where streams meet, mingle and are transformed, a confluence commemorated in my poem:

'The Meeting Point'

— MOHONA[4] —

Here by a reflective river
Reminiscing on a boat building past

The turquoise hull of Buena Vista[5]
Stands still, its journeys over.
Here I am a heron taking flight
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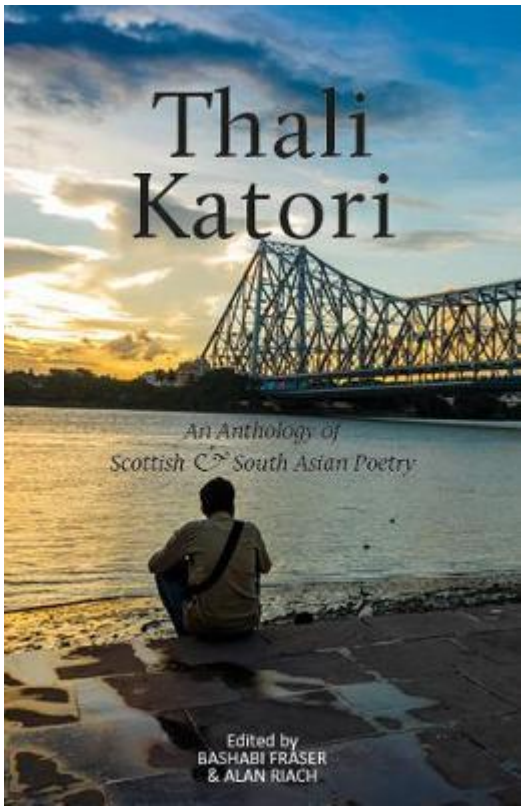
Able to dream of a riverine terrain[6]
And conjure a mohona
Of meetings the boats once intended.



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(c) The Bottle Imp