



KNOWN TURF

Annie Zaidi

Tranquebar

294 pp; Rs 250

WRITER ZAIDI

blends her political reportage with

personal reflections — almost like blog entries. The events and people she describes, from Punjabi families trying to book a ticket out of India to disarming dacoits, are a rare entry into a journalist's working mind — betrayed, unfortunately, by sub-par editing.



BRAKING NEWS

Sunetra Choudhury

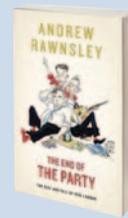
Hachette

320 pp; Rs 350

ANOTHER SEMI-

memoir about life on the road as a

journalist, NDTV reporter Choudhury relates her trip across India in the lead up to the 2009 Lok Sabha elections — ostensibly to locate the 'Indian voter'. The travelogue aspect of the book is far more enjoyable than its perfunctory political analysis.



THE END OF THE PARTY

Andrew Rawnsley

Viking

816 pp; £25

THIS PORTENTOUS

account by political

journalist Rawnsley has made waves in its depiction of outgoing PM Gordon Brown as an abusive despot. The incredibly detailed volume charts the decline of New Labour amid in-fighting and a loss of political will. Its timing couldn't have been worse for the party.

INDER SIDHU

MODERN RAJASTHANI literature is perhaps an enterprise of not more than two dozen individuals, though approximately 700 writers are said to be active at present. Often treated as Hindi's poor cousin, this literature has refused to obey all kinds of powerful others, most definitively the national(ist) narratives of history. And there is little doubt that no other writer represents this dynamic more enigmatically than its lead figure, Vijaydan Detha — aka Bijji. To some he has not been modern enough, to others

— found the intimate writer and killer it deserved.

Because he stands outside the colonial, he also stands outside the realm of standard realism. Genetically a rustic storyteller (as he'd like us to believe) and a magic realist by default (as I'd like you to accept without proof here), he offers us lost ways of our selfhood. His fiction is the world of our oppressed selves, but to him it's not a lost world of defeated selves but something that's simply there — like air, water and sand.

Whether they like it or not, such writers always become a temptation for foreign translators, but few avoid the casualties as sensitively as Christi A Merrill has managed to. The translator and the writer go back a long way, and she has benefited from observing how Bijji's writing (parallel to his adventures as an 'original' Hindi writer) has itself become a mutual exchange not just between two worldviews (pre-modern and contemporary) but also two languages, Hindi and Rajasthani.

These two volumes — by far his best in English till date — are outstanding in how they perform translation as an act of telling the story when your turn comes. By relocating herself in a tradition where a translator's role is hardly different from a writer's, Merrill is able to take up the baton of telling the story in a new language for a new audience.

(Kiradoo is the founder-editor of multilingual online magazine Pratilipi)



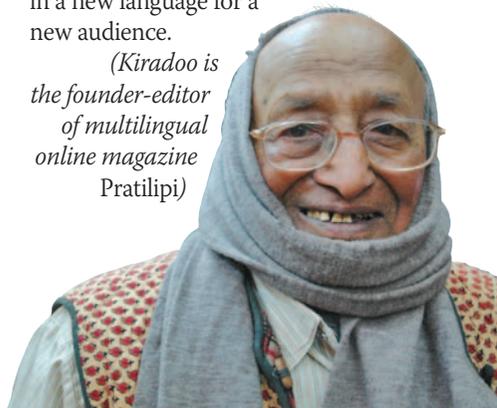
CHOBOLI AND OTHER STORIES I-II

Vijaydan Detha

Katha

368 pp;

Rs 1,500



THE RENEGADE RIDES AGAIN

Vijaydan Detha's charm masks a hidden politics, says GIRIRAJ KIRADOO

not radical enough and for still others, mostly at home in Rajasthan, not even writer enough — rather, just another transcriber of folk tales. And yet he is the most celebrated and canonised writer from his part of the world. Ironically, but almost obviously, he has had to be an outsiders' darling.

His strange charm perhaps has a very curious source: his work has no traces of colonisation. Neither the society he creates in his fiction nor the narrator's consciousness is bruised by colonisation. If ever one could, he stands outside the colonial and the postcolonial. In his fictionalised universe there is no colonial 'passage'. It is a history in continuum. Rather, colonialism happened more as a translation, masking itself as the local feudal powers — the actual intimate enemy was a familiar face. In Bijji, this intimate enemy — caste-based feudalism