



Editorial

Critical Negotiations: Between Resistance and Appropriation

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The present issue of *dialog* consists of an array of articles and papers which defy easy narrativization into a consistent framework. The heterogeneity of concerns that these papers articulate collectively however does bequeath us a perspective informed by the checkered matrices of contemporary time and space that we are situated in. Across the range of papers, there are some common theoretical tropes and stances. One, the papers begin with the premise that present epistemological baggage is inherently hegemonic and exclusionary which further begets questioning so that alternative voices can be heard and responded to. Two, none of the papers seek to hit the high metaphysical ground, rather the tone and tenor is patently political. Instead of hiding behind histories that masquerade as narratives of cogent objective memories, there is a play of fractured counter-memories. Instead of charting well-demarcated and structured homogeneous spaces, these papers bring forth heterotopias of contemporary landscapes. Three, these papers seek to strike a middle ground of critical negotiation – neither radical otherness, nor easy appropriation.

Each paper included in this issue has a thick texture such that multiple critical frames intersect in interdisciplinary ways to approach various texts and cultural events. The opening paper of the issue, for instance, foregrounds the distinctiveness of the entrepreneurial Parsi community, but through a close

textual reading of a travel account of a cycling trip across the globe undertaken by three Parsi men in 1923. The use of the bicycle as a tool of nationalist agenda, that too by the Parsi men, who are otherwise stereotyped as anglophiles, against a canvas as wide as the globe itself, in the heyday of imperialism opens up the possibilities of critical debate along many axes. Not only does the non-European traveler hold the potential to reverse the orientalist gaze, but he also runs the risk of being overawed by the grand narratives of western modernity. The ambivalences built in the travel encounter of the mobile Parsi men are argued in terms of the “hybrid modes of engagement”.

The paper on untranslatability as a strategy of resistance questions the loud claims of the translation industry of forging a global community comprised of unbiased readers across communities. The indigenous languages and their literature have their own local imperatives which refuse to be translated into the dominant languages of power, and it is in their refusal to fit into the given grid of mainstream languages that these indigenous languages and literature resist the exoticization of their interiority. The paper stops short of subscribing “a pure otherness” to indigenous literatures, but it suggests the role of multiple translations of untranslatable texts as a mechanism of meeting halfway the possibilities of resistance and appropriation implicit in the act of translation. Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar’s texts – *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* and *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* – amply illustrate the politics of both translatability and untranslatability.

Even as canonical histories are subjected to multiple re-writings, the tendency is to counter-narrate past

in terms that have a degree of cogency and definitiveness. Negritude, for instance, is deployed as a very precise marker of identity to counter the objectivities of white histories. The paper on Édouard Glissant's *The Fourth Century* (1964) underlines the necessity of retrieving the past through a plurality of creole cultures and not through a single black category. Again, the emphasis in this paper is on the ambiguities and paradoxical affinities that go into the making of a dissenting ruptured past. It is these ambiguities that need to be retained in the re-writing of the past.

Folk is often romanticized as people's lived culture that offers a ready discourse of counter-narrative to the hegemonic *margi* constructions of culture. But 'folk' in itself is not a very fixed category as much depends on its re-presentation in the performative present. The folk theatres all across India are steeped in gendered ideologies, and the paper on Srimanta Sankaradeva's Assamese one-act plays *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* and their subsequent presentation within the male-centric *Satras* of Majuli district foreground the concept of "fluid masculinity" that villainize not only hegemonic masculinity but also in some ways valorize "effeminate masculinity" of Krishna and Rama. The paper steers clear of bland binaries of masculinity versus femininity, rather it settles for a mixed configuration that subverts rigid prevalent Brahmanical ideals of gender and sex.

Space and time are often approached as fixed coordinates of any experience or event, but in a paper that undertakes a close textual reading of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, these coordinates form a continuum. Using Einstein's theory of special relativity, the writers of the paper approach space-time as a malleable and fluid

four-dimensional entity. The four characters of the novel brought together by the experiences of the Second World War enter in and out their multiple frames of space and time. Memories, fantasies, traumatic impressions, flash-forwards, intertextual disruptions yield a fairly irregular narrative in an otherwise chronotropic continuum. The extrapolation of the concepts of pure physics to the study of the architecture of a novel is indeed audacious, and as such, the paper makes its way in the present issue of *dialog*.

Naresh Kumar's paper on a musical band *Chaar Yaar* consisting of four friends – Madan Gopal Singh (the vocalist and the composer), Deepak Castelino (The Guitar and Banjo player), Pritam Ghosal (the Sarod Player), and Amjad Khan (the Percussionist) – is different from the usual academic papers. Based more on experience and his love for music, the paper is more of a write-up on the cosmopolitan consciousness of South Asian music. Focused largely on Madan Gopal Singh's life, the paper goes on to map the cultural and even political ramifications of the vast repertoire of musical performances of this band that came into existence in 2002. The band also performs "Rumi, John Lennon, Kabir, and Bulleh Shah in one song" which speaks of its 'inclusive' music beyond the categories of 'resistance' or 'devotion'.

Be it history, popular culture, mythology, or even the corporate present, women continue to suffer even as they challenge their objectification. Popular culture which derives its basic performative frames from the mythical past demonizes women as the traitors in tragic love-tales. Sahiban, a *qissa* heroine, is held responsible for the murder of Mirza, her lover in contemporary popular mainstream Hindi cinema. Sumneet Kaur and Chitwan question the

constant vilification of Sahiban as a sinner or unfaithful lover since the original narrative portrays the two lovers as victims of destiny with inherently tragic flaws. Seemingly, the corporate workspace has the makings of a very secular and progressive site, but a closer look suggests that even this capitalist haven continues to harbor cultural biases that exist in the outer society in general. Geeta Menzes's paper undertakes a critical study of the 2021 Netflix series *Bombay Begums* to reveal the inherent gendered character of the corporate workspace wherein even top women executives suffer from the rampant male gaze and sexism.

There are a couple of papers on Partition violence which continues to cast its long shadow on our 'secular' present. Deepanjali Baruah's paper problematizes the way memories of the partition survivors, particularly women, are manipulated by Urvashi Butalia in her *The Other Side of Silence*. The paper argues that memories are not spontaneous, rather they are pre-informed by the propagandistic discourses of state, media, and myth in which Partition is often played around for the consumption of contemporary politics. Ankita Rathee and Rekha read the movie *Khamosh Pani* as a cinematic text that depicts Partition violence as trauma endured and embodied by women on both sides of the border.

Sanatan Mandal and Smriti Singh draw our attention to the Battle of Kohima fought in 1944 as recounted through a personal memory of Mari in the novel *Mari* by Easterine Kire, the first Naga novelist in English. The grand narrative of history is countered through the lived experiences of Mari. Personal memory is pitched against the so-called objective claims of the accounts of history. Sahajmeet studies two novels of Julian Barnes namely *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and *The*

Noise of Time as non-linear fictional accounts that provide an antithesis to conventional histories structured along some arbitrary and exclusive cause-and-effect sequence.

Four papers deal with man's relational position vis-à-vis non-primate others – machines, animals, environment as a whole. These papers collectively mark a new 'turn' in the understanding of humanities in the age of the Anthropocene. Meenu Gupta's paper brings in a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective to map microscopically the discursive formations of identity in terms of its "machinic assemblages, becomings, [and] nomadism". Himashree Swargiary and Anjali Daimari's paper engages critically with Sukanya Datta's environmental dystopia "Modern Neelkanths" to mark an imminent angry backlash of revengeful Gaia against the excesses of the so-called sovereignty of man's rationalism. The last two papers -- one on the visual spectacle of the opening ceremony at the 2008 Olympics and another on the seductions of selfie-camera – point towards the exponential growth of a hyperreal world that is all set to knock out the very sense of 'the real' from our cognitive reach.

One of the key highlights of the issue is the inclusion of an English translation of Bhartendu Harishchandra's canonical Hindi skit *Andher Nagri, Chaupat Raja*. The satirical skit written in colloquial Avadhi has precise political undertones, and the credit goes to the translator-playwright Ravindra Pratap Singh of Lucknow University for venturing to bring this text into English. The skit is a political allegory, and it takes a dig at the megalomaniac king who orders everything in his kingdom to be sold for a *taka*. His concepts of socialism and justice bring catastrophe, and he ultimately succumbs to his vainglorious sense of divine salvation. The original

play known for its raciness and native wit reads well in the English translation, and the ironies and understatements of the text are well-captured in the foreign tongue.

Overall, the issue gives us a sense of the times we live in. While issues of re-writing history, of accessing the past, and of reclaiming the space for the subaltern continue to invite scholarly debates, the emerging debates on and around posthumanism have also attracted sufficient critical attention. These scholars have challenged stereotypes, but the tone is intellectually calibrated and non-propagandistic. Instead of falling into the trap of rhetorical tropes, the critical temper displays concern and social responsibility. In a way, the issue showcases the promising intellectual horizons of contemporary scholars.

In the publication of the present issue, the seminal role of the Mr. Jatinder Moudgil, Manager, Panjab University, Printing Press must be specially mentioned. He has taken utmost 'personal' care with a rare degree of professional acumen. The office staff of the Department of English and Cultural Studies has provided the necessary secretarial assistance, and has worked overtime to help us bring the issue in time. Of course, the team of editorial assistants has worked day in and day out to reach out to various reviewers and paper-writers to ensure the timely publication of the journal.