



Editorial

Excitements of Intellectual In-disciplinarity

Akshaya Kumar*

On the face of it, the present issue of *dialog* is an assortment of unrelated papers, interviews and reviews *sans* any overarching regular architecture. This open-endedness is deliberate and intentional. English Studies in India is on the cusp of cultural explosion, and its eclecticism is multiplying. If in 1960s the invasion of theory emanating from the metropolitan academia of West provided much needed expansiveness to the discipline, in post-1990s the unease with excessive intellectualization of the discipline once again demanded the return of experience and emotion back on the 'literary' landscape. The scene is both exciting and intimidating. Those who are too much disciplinary in their training find it difficult to harness their experiences for the purposes of research. So, the hiatus between experience and research continues. There are others who now have gathered the courage to go eclectic, and audaciously inter-disciplinary. This issue of the journal attempts to showcase the talent of the latter category of 'eclectic' researchers. Whether this eclecticism fructifies into some legible research or is just a smokescreen for in-disciplinarity is to be assessed by each reader at his/her own end. But it is time that research is given a freedom—freedom of going unclassified. There is no point in 'applying theory,' and rehearsing its categories *ad nauseum*. Research needs to be rescued from 'mechanical re-production.'

The first section of the issue opens with free-wheeling conversations with three poets—Arundhati Subramaniam, Amlanjyoti Goswami, and Kiriti Sengupta conducted on-stage in the presence of students and other poetry-*sahridyas* on three different dates. The exciting 'return of poetry' to the Department in itself heralds a relief from the

* Professor, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

over-presence of theory which has steamrolled departments of literatures all across the globe into paper-producing machines. Arundhati in her interactions covers the trajectory of her poetic journey from her first collection *On Cleaning Bookshelves* to her latest non-fictional work *Women Who Only Wear Themselves*. The conversation with Arundhati centers around the dominance of *bhakti* in her poetry and the possible emergence of *shakti*-school of poetry within the scope of Indian English poetry. Amlanjyoti opens up about his strategy of remaining relatively insular from the influences so as to exercise poetic freedom without any anxiety. Kiriti Sengupta defends his minimalist style of poetry, and goes on to suggest that his innate Bengali sensibility feeds his English poems.

As we step into the age of comparative Indian literature, translation of Indian language literature becomes the natural mandate of departments of English studies. The translations of first eight *salokas* of Sheikh Baba Fareed from *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* by a scholar Gurdeep Singh add a typical native Punjabi touch to the issue. Both the original verses in Gurumukhi and their translations in English have been given side-by-side for the connoisseurs and the critics to cross-check the veracity of the effort. The highlight of the issue is a short story, “He was a Good Man,” written by an emerging short-story writer and a poet Kinshuk Gupta. The story has been translated by Manika Arora with able assistance from Anjali Deshpande. The platitudes or the protocols of heteronormative familial structure often come in conflict with the unqualified love that the queer protagonist clamours to celebrate. The story covers the journey of the protagonist from his inhibition to accept his attraction for the same-sex, to finally his renouncing the prospect of social acceptance of such a love in a social set-up that is full of lies and cover-ups. The story critiques the death of the grandfather—the custodian of heteronormative values, and the entire spectacle of his last rites from a perspective which is new and ever radical to Hindi story.

A major section of the issue is devoted to diverse research papers, and these papers collectively offer us a wide range of critical spectrum. The first paper by Naresh Kumar on music festivals inside two temple precincts—*Devi Talab Mandir* (Jalandhar) and *Durgiana Mandir* (Amritsar)—opens up debates on the secular and sacred play

of registers within the experience of everyday culture. As these Hindu temples host singers of *ghazals* and *qawwalis* along with the singers of classical singers, the default syncretic and pluralistic nature of the festivals undergoes change. The paper ends on a compelling question whether ‘temple publics’ and ‘music publics’ overlap or they form two distinct spheres. The second paper offers a critique of the modern world, particularly the aggression of its excess capital through a close study of Satyajit Ray’s film *Two: A Film Fable*. The obsession of the ‘rich’ kid with plastic toys represents the reification of class, wealth and masculinity; the loose unhoused ‘poor’ kid, situated voluntarily as he is from the plastic capital, bears a more harmonious ecosophic relationship with his surroundings. Sumneet and Chitwan’s paper too brings in the issue of ‘ecological wounding’ due to the excessive presence of plastic in the environment. Tom Philips’s paper on Sudeep Sen’s poetry-collection *Anthropocene* extends the frontiers of cosmopolitanism as it calls for a consciousness of planetarity in the wake of cataclysmic changes in the climate.

The anthropological folkloric studies now lapse into Cultural Studies, and the boundaries between the disciplines are indeed blurring. The paper on Lord Modanmohan, the tutelary deity of Malla dynasty of Bishnupur is descriptive, but it foregrounds the impact of local icons have on culture of the region. Ramyajit Sarkar maps out the impact of this deity on food-habits, dress-codes and war-techniques of the people of Bishnupur. Sarita G’s paper undertakes a survey of African folk tales of Ashanti, an ethnolinguistic group from Ghana, with a special focus on Anasi, a trickster character. Anasi folktales are animal tales that mock at human follies. Dustin Lalkulhpua and Thongam Dhanajit take us to the complex dynamics of belonging and unbelonging in North-East of India through a nuanced reading of short fiction of Janice Pariat. Contesting the notions of pure ethnic identities, Pariat’s works represent the essential nature of hybridized co-existence. There are two papers on Dalit texts. Pooja Duggal’s paper focuses on Aravind Malagatti’s Dalit autobiography, *Government Brahmana*, which challenges the conventional norms of representing animal cruelty by de-aestheticizing it. The paper further examines the agency and subjectivity attributed to animals in Malagatti’s narrative, emphasizing the need to recognize animals as active agents. Maitrayee Sarma undertakes a comparative analysis of

Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* and Ajay Navaria's "Scream" to foreground the close proximity of modernist anti-hero with Dalit hero.

Richa Joshi Pandey's paper draws our attention to the ethical issues of friendship and diplomacy as spelled out in *Hitopadesha*. The fabular text written around 800 CE provides a rich taxonomy of varieties of friendship within the framework of *niti* and *dharma*. The author of the paper lends a thicker texture to her writing by invoking references from *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti*. The paper gains importance in the context of debates of cosmopolitanism and friendship given by western theorists from Derrida to Agamben. Through a textual analysis of Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, and Hansda Sowendra Shekhar's "They Eat Meat", Rekha Rani and Saru Sachdeva in their paper emphasize upon the role of food as a symbol of social community and mutual obligations. Food is examined through the lens of Paul du Gay's "circuit of culture," encompassing representations, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Furthermore, the paper discusses how fear and discrimination are used to shape food choices and behaviours, leading to cultural assimilation and the suppression of indigenous food practices.

Sehnaz Rofique Saikia's paper delves into the intricate theme of identity, particularly the protagonist Askar's quest for a stable sexual and national identity within a postmodern narrative framework through a critical reading of Nuruddin Farah's novel *Maps*. *Maps* challenges essentialist notions of identity by highlighting the fluidity and uncertainty inherent in the postcolonial Somali context. The narrative exposes the impossibility of a stable national or ethnic identity due to historical and colonial complexities. If Saikia's paper foregrounds the crisis of manhood, Ishani Saha's paper highlights the marginalization of female homoeroticism due to societal prohibitions, leading to a lack of discourse and visibility. It then traces the evolution of visual representation, from classical art to modern digital platforms, emphasizing the role of female photographers like Nancy Goldin and Judy Francesconi in reclaiming lesbian subjectivity. The analysis is divided into two categories of Instagram posts: those less sexually explicit and those more sexually

explicit. The less explicit category emphasizes touch, rewriting castration, and redefining the lack of the female body. The more explicit category explores the erogenous zones of the female body, the body as a political weapon against societal norms, and the dissolution of binary distinctions in intimate relationships.

The last two 'theoretical' papers show the continual presence of literary theory in academia. Debdas Roy examines Roland Barthes' assertion of the "death of the author," as he argues that the of subjectivity of experience of authors, particularly women, is essential in decoding their works. The schism within postmodern feminism arises from the tension between celebrating female authorship and deconstructing authorial authority, reflecting the complex interplay between feminism and poststructuralist thought. Ujjal Jeet's paper dissects differing explanations for the perpetuation of gender roles, including the political view of gender oppression within capitalist systems, the impact of agricultural technology on patriarchy, and the significance of sexual relations. The construction of two myths, namely the seductress and the good mother, is examined as pivotal instruments in denigrating and controlling women's reproductive power, reinforcing patriarchal ideals. These myths serve to maintain male dominance and symbolize the association of masculinity with power, further complicating women's quest for equality.

The interviews, the papers and book reviews included in this issue thus cover a proliferating range of themes and concerns, orientations and perspectives, revealing the innate democratic and pluralistic character of English Studies in India now. While the emerging scenario is promising, it is also challenging to take onboard the multiplicities of discourses within the institutionalized framework of the discipline under a growing environment of control and quantification.

Before I close down my write-up, I am obliged to mention the loss that the world of literature has suffered in the past few days. The city lost two of its most illustrious Hindi writers and critics—Virendra Mehndiratta and Ramesh Kuntal Megh. The former used to host a mini literary conclave for decades from his house under the name

‘Abhivyakti’, and there was hardly a writer of city who could afford to miss its monthly meetings. Personally, I attended many of its meetings and interacted with writers of all the three-four languages of the city. Megh taught at many universities in the region and the US also. Author of many critically very rigorous works, he was awarded Sahitya Akademi award for his work *Vishamithaksaritsagar* in 2017. The Department had invited him to speak on Nirmal Verma some years ago. The death of leading Indian poet Jayanata Mahapatra is no less disturbing. He, along with Ezekiel and Ramanujan created an audience for Indian English poetry in India—which now is booming with the arrival of a whole lot of young poets. Sudeep Sen who compiles *Converse*—an anthology of poems to mark the 75th years of India’s independence, acknowledges Mahapatra as his guru and mentor. I too had many interactions with the stalwart poet. I am sharing one his letters that he wrote to me in the year 2002 when I sent him my essay on A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry “Time as Poetry” for publication in *Chandrabhaga*.

Lastly, some acknowledgments are must. The Department is grateful to scholars from all over India for their contributions in the form of papers and book reviews. We are also thankful to our team of reviewers who responded to our requests within given time frame. I am thankful to other members of the Editorial Board and Advisory Board for their encouragement and constant suggestions and feedback. The publication of an issue of this magnitude at the end of the day is collective task, and the role of editorial assistants is very significant. I am particularly thankful to Sanyogita and Gaurav Kalra for their hard work and their sense of dutifulness. The manager of the press Mr. Jitender Moudgil, the typesetter Shubham and the office staff of the Department of English and Cultural Studies have done their best to see the timely publication of *dialog* (41).

Letter from Jayanata Mahapatra

Trivenia Bagicha, Cuttack 753 001, Orissa [Tel: 0671-617434]
July 1, 2002 P.S. I don't have email!

Dear Akshaya

May I call you so? Please do address me any way you like - plain 'Jayanata' would be fine. These things really don't matter; but please don't use the 'ji'. I am at ease with younger people, and like to forget I'll be 74 soon!

We will be delighted to use your Ramanujan essay in the Summer 2003 issue of *Q*. We have finalised eps for the forthcoming issue (Winter 2002), and this is keeping me somewhat occupied. But in the essay - is the line "In Ramanujan poetry, time . . . consciousness" (P 17, last lines) right? Kindly confirm.

Time has always been of concern to people everywhere. My hero and guru is Einstein, and his eyes stare up at me from a photograph on my desk. I wrote an essay on time in relation to my poetry some time back. If you'd like to see it, I'll send a xerox to you.

But I do enclose a "poem" I wrote on Ramanujan when I heard of his death - just to share it with you.

Maybe you know best whom you could pit Ramanujan against - both language poets and contemporaries? We'll talk this over sometime if you are still interested.

I am sending by separate post the current issue of *Q*. Do let me know what I can do to improve the magazine.

And, thank you again for your Ramanujan piece. Best wishes.

Sincerely, Jayanata