



Editorial

Towards an Affective Cultural Studies

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Cultural Studies as a project of interdisciplinary research continues to thrive. But its journey in the last half a century has been a saga of strategic shifts and remarkable critical revisions. What started as a project on the side-lines of ‘humanist’ literature departments, turned out to be a compulsive pedagogical and research need of the new scholars. And right from the 1960s to the 1990s, a wide array of critical theories – from postcolonialism to feminism – were taken onboard within the capacious scope of the project to foreground primarily the politics of representation in all kinds of cultural texts – low or high. The universalist claims of knowledge and literature were challenged, and it led to what, at times, is dramatically described as ‘epistemic violence’. When the decibel level of identarian warfare reached levels of lunacy, Cultural Studies as a project re-discovered itself as it began to question the sovereign instrumentality of human reason. The post-humanist turn, post-90s sought to usher in a cooperative framework of cognition in which the human and the non-human participate through affective tentacular networks. The issues of caste, race, gender, and nation remain important, but the impending concern about the very survival of human beings as a species in the age of the Anthropocene necessitates a planetary expansion of horizons that takes into sweep the entire earth with all its species in a non-hierarchical framework of cosmopolitan co-existence. The papers included in this issue of the *dialog*, in a way, form an enabling epistemic, ethical and lately ontological coordinates of this ongoing journey of Cultural Studies.

In the opening paper of the issue, Jhilaam Chattaraj through a close textual reading of Sudeep Sen’s latest poetry collection *Red*

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hints towards the emergence of what she terms as ‘geo-humanities’ – an offshoot of new cultural materialism. The rock fossils, the grasslands, the wildlife sanctuaries hitherto perceived as docile, passive wild backdrops participate in the act of meaning-making as affective eco-scapes of intra-action. Sen emerges as a poet of ‘creative geography’ and its palimpsest textualities. The colour ‘red’, irrespective of its religious, ideological or civilizational connotations, emerges as a primal instinct of affect that overwhelms the poet into a rhapsody of oneness with the visceral surroundings. Akhil Katyal through his part-autobiographical, part-academic write-up, tries to map out the possible pedagogy of creative writing both inside and outside the scope of the classroom. As the students are exposed to a diverse range of prescribed literary texts, dealing with a plethora of emotions, the potentially creative students harness these resources to their advantage. Akhil postulates the concept of a ‘bibliography of affect’ to suggest the possible role of creative pedagogy. Instead of building a sharp polarity between academics and creative writing, he draws upon the happy and productive complementarity of the two faculties, sites and practices.

In a co-authored paper Shyam Sundar Pal and Ananya Ghoshal explore the relationship of the human with the non-human through a close reading of Tagore’s story *Samapti* (1893) and its adaption into a movie by Satyajit Ray through a critical framework provided by Tagore himself in his collection of essays *Palliprakiti* (rural nature). Mrinmoyee, the young girl in the story, is portrayed in terms of intimate non-human attributes, and Ray picturizes her in the company of a rodent chipmunk whom she befriends and protects like an adopted baby. Invoking the concept of ecological grief, the authors reveal the pangs of hiatus between nature and human beings. In another paper, drawing on the concepts of liminality, and its inter-structural/ anti-structural dynamics as propounded by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage*, Medha Devi through a reading of Avinuo Kire’s folk fantasy novel *Where the Cobbled Path Leads* (2022), set in Nagaland, brings into focus the role of the space of forest as a catalytic affective presence in transforming the protagonist and people who inhabit it. Liminality is seen as a web of

transition, a state of profound indeterminacy in which an individual navigates across human and non-human actors to undergo transformations.

Sanyogita Singh studies Graham Swift's *Waterland* as a text which, in significant ways, anticipates the concept of spacetime-mattering as posited by Karen Barad in her seminal work *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. The approach to understanding the dynamics of space in terms of intra-active entanglements of space and time brings philosophical rigour to the paper. Toys are not just playthings; they provide an affective joy of companionship. As Cultural Studies takes a spatial turn, it takes into its critical stride the study of places and territories as affective sites of experiences and emotions. Vanya Jaiswal employs the framework of countervisuality, as theorized by Mirzoeff, to decode the making of a sacred cosmopolis called Varanasi or Banaras through a reading of Kashinath Singh's controversial novel *Kashi ka Assi*. Chetna Karnani's paper zeroes in on Bombay as a third-space located between dystopia and utopia. Her chosen text of analysis is Rajinder Singh Bedi's film *Dastak*. Simrat Khurana in her paper, makes an attempt to offer the cultural history of Punjabi literary magazine *Preetlari*. Enunciating the conceptual contours of the magazine, she explains how the editor of the magazine Gurbaksh Singh goes on to build a township Preetnagar based on the principle of cosmopolitanism and love. The magazine and the corresponding township generate a unique affective synergy of cohabitation.

Some of the papers included in the present issue continue to engage with the pressing issues of the Foucauldian power-knowledge relationship. Using the theories of Pierre Bourdieu of social capital and ideas of Roland Barthes on contra-censorship, Uday Khanna reads Surendra Verma's play *Aathva Sarg* as a text implicated in the eternal questions of censorship and hegemony, and violence. The paper demonstrates how Kalidasa as a writer survives the propaganda against him through his writerly prowess and perseverance. Within the scope of Cultural Studies, the politics of Orientalism remains an abiding area of active research. Ayusman Chakraborty's paper demonstrates how the Hindu ascetic practice of spike-lying (*śankuśī*)

was reduced or desacralized into a stunt of showmanship of religious mendicants in the Western accounts. The author offers a comprehensive moral and metaphysical account of the practices of self-mortification within Hinduism. Rishiraj Sen and Shweta Jha in their reading of journalist Margaret Bourke-White's photos of the Calcutta killings of 1946 on a call given for Direct Action Day, invest more in the politics of the photographer, than in an ekphrastic explanation of the visual images.

Wars leave behind a trail of emotional trauma, and those who suffer then struggle to find ways to cope with it. Jaydweep Rabha's paper focuses on the emotions of fear and anxiety suffered by women in particular during and after the wars. Through a reading of fictional texts, the author suggests the possibility of building 'emotional communities' in war-hit societies. In a paper co-authored by Riya Mukherjee, Suraj Gunwant, 'female fantastic cinema' is approached as a cinema of desire in which the patriarchal gaze is subverted. Horror as a (monstrous) emotion is employed to challenge the so-called rational symbolic male order. The authors argue that Kristeva's idea of the abject is inadequate to explain the cultural role of the female fantastic cinema in the Indian context. Samayita Dasgupta in her critical essay on toys opens a vast range of emotions that are attached to the toys. As toys travel across generations, they provide material memories of time and space. Banking largely on the insights of Baudelaire, the essay delineates a running conceptual history of toys as playing for pleasure and education.

Popular sports, popular fiction, fashion, fandom, and films are some of the other areas that now scholars are approaching with renewed interest. Instead of taking positions along the settled trajectories of the Frankfurt or Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, the scholars are geared more towards intersectional studies. Popular sports, for instance, has been approached as a discursive site of gender-centric identity assertions. Through a reading of life-narratives of two footballers – one of male footballer Robbie Rogers's *Coming Out to Play* and the other of a female footballer Megan Rapinoe's *One Life*, Srutayu Bhattacharya draws our attention to the prevalence of a pronounced homophobic culture in male

football. In female football, however, there is a greater inclusivity, and acceptance of non-heterosexual culture. Fashion is a dynamic field of critical inquiry. Gurpreet Kaur undertakes a study of diasporic designs and fashionscapes within the critical framework of what she terms as 'postfashion'. Partition casts a long shadow on the history and future of the subcontinent. Harpreet Kaur's paper analyses the market dynamics of Indian popular fiction. Devika Kakkar's paper undertakes a survey of changing frames of aesthetics, with special focus on emergence of new media aesthetics particularly in the context of re-writing classical myths according to the demands of fans.

Besides the research papers, the present issue also carries three interviews with contemporary poets of Indian English, namely Akhil Katyal, Maaz Bin Bilal and Sarabjeet Garcha. These interviews are the transcribed versions of extended conversations that were conducted before a live audience in the Department. The three interviews, put together, hint towards the possible comeback of the literary and the poetical in academics and research. The poems by Amlanjyoti Goswami and Sudeep Sen add rare depth to an otherwise expansive compass of the current issue. Amlanjyoti's poems offer homage to famous Chandigarh-based art-historian Prof. B.N. Goswami who passed away recently. Anup Beniwal's translated poems of Hindi poets across generations, present in a way the march of Hindi imagination as it evolves in post-Independent India. Overall, the issue has papers, poems, interviews and translations that will have archival value for a long time. The entire editorial team, reviewers of papers, members of Advisory Board, various contributors, the office staff of the Department of English and Cultural Studies, and Manager Press Mr Jatinder Moudgil – all have played their part in the making of the present issue.