



Editorial

Towards Critical Spatiality: Re-Routing Literary Studies

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The obligations to dig deep invariably take us along the vertical axis of time. Going horizontal is flat, plainly boring and critically unexciting. The place or space which provides a fulcrum to history, for it to happen and implode, is usually taken for granted as a passive site, *sans* any possibility of inter-active entanglements. Through the sustained efforts of Stephan Greenblatt, Hayden White, Louis Montrose and others, the discourse of history – in its new textualised ways – has remained in the critical reckoning. The vector of space, however, continues to suffer critical neglect. It is only recently that a new sense of geography has made its way as researchers now begin to probe the textuality of place as a discursive site of competing and complementary conceptions, perceptions and lived experiences. Foucault, Lefebvre, Edward Soja and many others have given ‘space’ a critical precedence that bring a rare critical impetus to the trope of ‘route’ over and above the much sought-after regressive metaphor of the ‘root.’ Traversing across a landscape, or inhabiting a space yields its own affective topophrenia – a place-mindedness, which in terms of its cognitive value is critically no less important than the nostalgic narrative of deep time. The space in a neo-geographical setting is dynamic, textual, chequered, interspersed and heterotopic. It can be produced and reproduced, configured and reconfigured, arranged and rearranged to host new localities and correspondingly create new neighbourhoods.

Though the present issue of the *dialog* is not theme-specific, and the papers included in it are varied in terms of their thrust and methodological orientations, yet most of the papers tend to explore the spatial networks and the ontological flows that run through them in multiple ways. In the very first paper, using Foucault’s template of heterotopic configurations of the space, Komal Yadav reads closely Bishwanath Ghosh’s train travelogue *Chai Chai: Travels in Places Where You Stop but Never Get off* (2009). As the train traverses

through the landscape, passing across six junctions, the emerging heterotopias inside the compartment, challenge the dominant discourse of India as a cultural monolith. Reading junctions as a ‘non-place’ further unsettles the notion of space as an absolute organic anthropological fixed entity; the space is seen as a set of relational matrices, where indifferent passengers both inside the compartments, and outside on the platforms interact purely on contractual basis. The paper traces how non-places begin to acquire a sense of ‘place,’ and how junctions with the passage of time provide daily passenger a sense of cohesive working identity.

Siddharth Satpathy’s paper “Ecology, Literature and the Sense of Place: Floods in Colonial Odisha, 1907–1937,” foregrounds the role of literary and non-literary discourses about floods in Odisha towards the making of place-consciousness. The floods – an ecological disaster, were approached differently, by the British colonialist, the nationalist elite and the regional writers according to their respective power-dynamics. While the colonialists placed the phenomenon of floods in the larger framework of ecological crisis, without ever-holding their own colonial policies of lop-sided development as the cause of it; the nationalists saw it as a tragedy for the poor people of Odisha who are in need of philanthropy. The regionalists see the bio-zone of the province as a body that needs affective engagement, an eco-sensitive familial bonding. In a co-authored paper Maria Sebastian and Susan Mathew take us back to the fairylands which once upon a time were sites of ecological bliss. The spectre of Anthropocene, as the sum total of all the disasters that have happened to mankind, now threatens to leak into the idyllic world of fairy tales, generating a sense of ‘solastalgia’—an affective feeling which is caused due to disruption of existing order, and which overturns place-identity.

In the new spatial order, the places are no longer originary blackholes; rather they are porous, always open to their inevitable hybridisation. The liminal hyphenated zones or interstitial spaces cannot be glossed over in an anxiety to draw a definitive atlas of the globe. Dealing with Anjum Hasan’s novel *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*, John Bosco invokes Bhabha’s theory of the ‘Third Space’ to come to terms with the conventional binary of the insider-outsider. In its attempt to understand the quandaries of North-Eastern states, the

paper goes beyond the poetics of negotiation to suggest ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ as the way forward. In another paper by Minu Susan Koshy, the problematics of insider-outsider binary is resolved through the idea of “sanctioned trespassing.” Using Lefebvre’s concept of ‘rhythmanalysis,’ Koshy proposes that migrants are ideal rhythmanalysts; while being inside the city, they enjoy the necessary critical distance to observe the rhythms of their adopted homeland. The author takes up Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Roman Stories* for her textual analysis of urban landscapes. The phenomenon of reverse migration, particularly induced by epidemics and other natural disasters, is taken up by Kanika Panghal and Ila Rathore in their paper “Reverse Internal Migration”. Using theoretical insights of “Self-Categorization” as proposed by David Willer and Henri Tajfel’s “Social Identity Theory,” the two scholars study the pangs of belongingness through a study of two novels: *1232 Km: The Long Journey Home* by Vinod Kapri and *Homebound* by Puja Changoiwala.

In another co-authored paper “Plastic Landscapes,” Smaranika Chakraborty and Himangshu Sarma while emphasising the morphologies of landscape underline the importance of relationality and interconnectedness among the unorganised things and objects – human and non-human – that occupy a space, go on to analyse at length the disrupting role of overuse of plastic and other reckless Anthropocene activities through a reading of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985). As planet Earth becomes uninhabitable, the fictional imagination seeks to visualise alternative sites and spaces for posthuman futures. In their reading of Divya Srinivasan Breed’s *Meru* – a speculative work of fiction, co-authors Manpreet Kaur and Simran Mittal unfold a world which is not hierarchised along gender-lines, or not influenced by colonial-postcolonial hangovers. Virtual sites create unprecedented textual possibilities within the discourse of space and territoriality.

The space, more so if it is specified, inter-acts with the persons or things that it inhabits, at an ontological level. The space of temple with young women as servants of the presiding god or deity, immediately brings into critical contention the inter-section of gender, religion and site. Temples turn into bastion of patriarchy. Neha Rohilla and Rekha Rani in their paper on *devadasi* system and

its latter-day mutations within ancient temples, through a study of Vaasanthi's "The Symbol" and Rishi Reddi's "Devadasi" foreground the site of temple as the compelling space of priestly authority, and structural female oppression. Gurjeet Singh's paper also is significant from the angle of cultural anthropology as he catalogues various rituals that Punjabi eunuchs perform inside their *deras*. The site of *dera*, and the power-dynamics inside the close-confines of it, is keenly captured through a study of Punjabi fictional texts that venture to delineate the miseries and joys of the eunuchs. Another space – that of theatre – as a site of radical re-writing of the myths – is explored by Indu Jain in her paper on Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry's experiments with Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* with a special focus on the creative use of native folk resources.

The spaces are ossified into legible and mappable public spheres through processes of modernisation, and in this context the printing press played a pivotal role. Due to inbuilt compulsions of print capitalism, the vernaculars are standardised, and turned into national languages. Any language is a medium of communication, but it also suggests a corresponding space. Aliya Halim's paper brings into critical focus the varieties of Bangla registers which acquire communal overtones over the passage of time. The Bangla Muslim writers preferred an interiorised Persianised form of Bangla, as compared to Bangla Hindu writers who chose a more Sanskritised form of the same language. Such differences can be discerned in case of Punjabi language as well. In Pakistani Punjabi, the influence of Arabic and Persian is more pronounced, whereas in Indian Punjab, Punjabi is more Sanskritised. Vijaya Singh's paper takes up caste atrocities that occur around the rural landscape on river Kamma created fictionally by Bama in her short stories collection *Harum-Scarum Saar and Other Stories*. The narratives that emanate from this space are sad, tragic, and defiant, but the poetics is that of disdain and derisive laughter.

Since languages create their own spatial spread and distinct geographical borders, the rhetoric of nationalism rests on 'linguistic' divides and differentiations. In this context, the issues of translation are inextricably linked to the politics of nation as a space. Rimpa Mondal in her paper builds on John Ciardi's basic premise that dubbing, like translation, is an exercise in good failure. At a

fundamental level, the author does not romanticise the purity or insularity of both language, and space. Sakoon Singh's paper also, in a way, is implicated in the politics of a translational process called 'conversion' through which individual or communities undergo a process of identity transformation. She zeroes in on the forcible conversion of the child Maharaja Duleep Singh into Christianity by the colonial administrators to delineate how a potential king was exiled from his own kingdom and his people.

In the present issue of *dialog*, there are quite a few papers which bring onboard the issue of health care and concern, through an enabling interface of literature and visual culture, online as well as offline. In her paper on "Alternative Rationality and Agency" through a reading of the first-person accounts of the patients of schizophrenia, Arunima very persuasively overturns the myths of madness that are usually associated with such patients. The paper on menstruation ad-campaigns through memes run on social media platforms (particularly Instagram) underline the collective role of visual culture, literature and digital humanities in subverting stereotypes and fostering new ways of activism. Another paper "Crimson Realities" by Hima S. Madhu and Nayana M. Pradeep, also takes us through an array of writings on the body politics in which the discourse of menstruation is embedded, to the disadvantage of the female. There is one more 'unusual' paper by Kanak Kanti Bera that employs the matrices of optimality theory to study the psychological processes of moral-decision by women in Indian English fiction.

The issue, like the previous issues of *dialog*, includes scripts of two conversations that were hosted in the University with two leading writers of Indian English, namely – Sumana Roy and Arundhati Subramaniam. The issue also consists of a translation of a folk Bhojpuri skit called *Surawa Natak*. The difficult text has been translated by Prof. Ravindra Pratap Singh who has done seminal work in the domain of folk theatre and its translations into English. The poems of Amlanjyoti Goswami and Jaydeep Sarangi lend an extra edge to the journal, and in the coming issues, the component of creative writing shall find more space. There are four book reviews covering various aspects of contemporary critical issues. Overall, the issue has enough variety and a necessary academic standard.

Towards the compilation of this issue, two editorial assistants – Chahat Rampal and Arunjot Kaur – have played a significant role. They reached out to experts, referees and paper-writers to coordinate a timely publication of the issue. Chairperson of the Department, Prof. Meenu A. Gupta, has also lent her unconditional support, and the office staff of the Department has worked like a cohesive team. Shubham Choudhry, the typesetter and the manager of the Printing Press, Mr. Jatinder Moudgil, have given the necessary final touches to the issue and we hope it lives to the expectations of all the stakeholders.