



Editorial

Cultural Afterlives and Ethical Reimagining in Contemporary Times

Issue No. 45 of *dialog* brings together research papers that mobilise diverse strands of popular culture—literature, cinema, performance, memoir, translation, and humour—as critical sites for reflecting upon contemporary social concerns and imagining ethical deflections from them. In the spirit of Raymond Williams’s reminder that “culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind,” the issue treats cultural forms not as aesthetic embellishments but as lived practices through which social realities are negotiated, resisted, and reimagined (Williams, 1958/1989). This understanding resonates closely with A. K. Ramanujan’s view of tradition as something that is not static but “a series of discontinuous continuities,” shaped through acts of remembering, translation, and reinterpretation.

A significant strand of the issue engages ecological thought through literary memory, translation, and place-based practices. Papers revisiting ancient literary ecosystems argue that classical texts encode sophisticated ecological ethics that can counter the violence of extractive modernity and environmental collapse. Walter Benjamin’s notion of translation as ensuring a text’s *afterlife* finds a parallel here: translation becomes not merely a linguistic transfer but an ethical reactivation of ecological knowledge for the present. This ecological concern is further extended through studies of borderland communities whose practices of dwelling resist mainstream exploitation and foreground relational coexistence with land. Trauma—both intimate and collective—forms another critical axis of the issue. Essays examining women’s domestic trauma alongside genocide memoirs reveal the uneven politics of memory, where some forms of suffering are institutionalised and ritualised while

others quietly sediment across generations. As Cathy Caruth reminds us, trauma is “an experience that is not fully owned,” returning belatedly and insistently (Caruth 1995: 151).

Cinema and performance culture emerge as vital mediating forms that sustain critique across spatio-temporal and cultural divides. Studies of Shakespearean adaptations in Eastern cinematic traditions demonstrate how classical tragedy survives through transnational and diagonal adaptations, where ambition, morality, and identity are re-inscribed within new sociopolitical contexts. Alongside this, analyses of performance cultures—ranging from stand-up comedy to satire—foreground humour as a precarious yet potent mode of dissent. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, laughter performs a carnivalesque function, while in Indian aesthetic thought it recalls the dual movement of *hāsyā rasa*, which both exposes social contradiction and offers momentary relief from it.

Extending and reframing these concerns, the paper on neurodivergence and soft aesthetics provides a crucial posthuman and affective lens through which the issue coheres. By foregrounding the receiver’s sensory and cognitive experience, it resonates with Gilles Deleuze’s insistence that affect is “the capacity to affect and be affected,” while also echoing Abhinavagupta’s emphasis on *sahṛdaya*—the attuned, responsive reader or spectator who completes the aesthetic experience. Literature, cinema, performance, and humour are thus re-read not merely as representational forms but as affective encounters that reshape perception and ethical response.

As has often been the case in literary and cultural history, the ancient is re-looked and re-visited here not as nostalgia but as a reservoir of hope. Translation, adaptation, and performance emerge as critical tools for reaching new shores, while comic devices—humour, satire, irony, and laughter—simultaneously accentuate pain and emolliate it for the voiceless. In reaffirming

literature's enduring influence as a mode of ethical connection, *dialog* Issue No. 45 positions cultural practice itself as a site of responsibility, resilience, and imaginative renewal.

Engaging with the ecological turn in Translation Studies, Salma Begum and Sanjib Sahoo rethink Girmitiya literature beyond its dominant human-centred narrative. Their article mobilizes Eco-translation and Ecolinguistics to interrogate the erasure of environmental agency in translations of Abhimanyu Unnuth's *Lal Pasina*, proposing re-translation as an ethical and activist practice responsive to extractivist colonial histories and contemporary climate crises.

Smrity Jayara's contribution interrogates the fraught relationship between humour and disability, asking whether laughter serves as comic relief or social commentary. Drawing on Disability Studies and cultural theory, the article charts the evolution of disability humour from stigmatizing caricature to an ethically grounded, self-authored mode of expression. The study compellingly demonstrates how stand-up comedy and contemporary literary representations enable persons with disabilities to subvert stereotypes and challenge normative assumptions.

This issue includes Jaidev Bishnoi's essay on Chandrika Balan's short fiction, which examines female subjectivity and everyday life in Malayalam literature through feminist aesthetics and the lens of everyday resistance. By critically engaging with the discourse of *pennezhuthu*, the paper foregrounds subaltern agency articulated through negotiation, ambivalence, and lived experience rather than overt radicalism. The essay contributes to ongoing discussions on gender, agency, and narrative strategies in Indian women's writing; its insistence on reading women's agency within context, vulnerability, and contradiction—an approach that enriches current feminist literary scholarship. The paper engaging Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* as a testimonial

archive of everyday suffering is particularly significant for its refusal of trauma as a spectacle. It examines forms of gendered violence that unfold not in moments of catastrophe but through the slow erosion of women's bodies and subjectivities, thereby extending feminist trauma studies beyond Eurocentric paradigms. Conceptualising trauma as vernacular and insidious rather than spatially or temporally discrete, the essay traces how coercion embedded within marriage vows, reproductive expectations, and religious authority is rendered invisible and legally inaudible. The analysis foregrounds the failure of juridical and religious institutions—often structured by patriarchal bias—to recognise or redress such harm, thereby exposing the ethical limits of law when confronted with intimate, normalised violence.

From Banu Mushtaq's feminist short stories, which expose everyday domestic violence within intimate and religious spaces, to Consolée Nishimwe's Rwandan genocide memoir that narrativises the biopolitical regulation of life and death, the contributions in this editorial collectively interrogate how trauma is experienced, remembered, and mediated at the intersection of the individual and the collective.

By engaging multiple registers of marginality, this edition interrogates the silences produced by dominant cultural, political, and environmental narratives. Renuka K and Jenisha T's essay intervenes in this discourse through a reading of borderland travel writing, foregrounding how precarious environments are not merely endured but meaningfully inhabited through affective bonds and topophilic attachments to place. Drawing on Environmental Humanities and spatial theory, the paper reframes borderlands as sites of ecological belonging and quiet resistance rather than zones of abandonment.

Extending ecological inquiry, this issue also foregrounds ecological thought rooted in classical literary traditions.

Manjeera G's paper reads Illanko Atikal's *Cillapatikaram* through the lens of environmental aesthetics, demonstrating how the Akam poetic system—structured through the coded *tinai*s—articulates a non-binary, eco-social imagination where human life and natural landscapes co-emerge. By revisiting Sangam ecologies, the essay argues that ancient Tamil literary frameworks offer vital resources for reviving, reconfiguring, and rebuilding greener imaginaries beyond dominant Western environmental models.

This issue also includes a study that revisits Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* through their modern Eastern film adaptations, foregrounding the enduring relevance of the tragic hero across cultures and media. By analysing Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* and Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* and *Omkaara*, the paper demonstrates how diagonal adaptations reconfigure ambition, morality, and identity within distinct sociopolitical and cultural landscapes. The contribution situates Shakespearean tragedy within a transnational cinematic praxis, revealing how cultural transposition sustains the ethical and psychological force of classical drama.

Another article positions neurodivergent cognition as a posthumanist lens through which contemporary media aesthetics can be critically rethought. By foregrounding neurodivergent embodiment as a phenomenologically rich and epistemically productive mode of cognition, it demonstrates how sensory multiplicity and non-linear perception illuminate broader questions of media, technology, and aesthetic experience. The contribution aligns with *dialog's* interdisciplinary inquiry by bridging posthuman theory, media studies, and alternative epistemologies.

This issue also engages contemporary performance cultures through a grounded study of Indian stand-up comedy as a spatially and socially mediated form. Drawing on ethnographic

fieldwork across multiple cities, the paper theorises the “comic frame” as a fragile regime of conditional immunity produced through venue design, audience expectations, affective labour, and media circulation, within which subversion becomes temporarily permissible. By tracing how this frame is negotiated, stretched, and at times shattered—especially in digital afterlives of live performances—the article contributes to debates on censorship, reception, and the politics of humour in present-day India.

The issue is further enriched by a poetic cluster that sharpens dialog’s ethical and ecological imagination through lyric dissent: alongside Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta’s recent works “Midnight” and “Dystopia,” that articulate historical trauma, dystopian ecology, and moral anguish through what Adorno would call poetry’s “negative dialectics.” Moving from meta-poetic reflection to searing geopolitical critique and prayerful lament, bearing witness to contemporary violence and collective anguish, these reaffirm poetry’s role, in A.K. Ramanujan’s sense, as a form where “history, myth, and ethics meet in language.” Jasmine Kaur Chandla’s “The Fruits of Knowing” and “The Lichen and I” articulate feminist epistemic awakening, domestic ideology, and asymmetrical intimacy through allegorical and eco-symbolic modes. Drawing on the Edenic myth of forbidden knowledge and the everyday iconography of Indian domestic life, “The Fruits of Knowing” stages what might be read, in Foucauldian terms, as the gendered cost of consciousness—where learning becomes both liberation and social threat, and the female subject is suspended between intellectual becoming and affective containment. “The Lichen and I,” by contrast, mobilises ecological symbiosis as a relational metaphor to expose the silent economies of care, labour, and emotional extraction embedded in idealised narratives of love. Patrick Aura’s poems trace silent labour, generational precarity, and fragile ecologies using a materialist–eco-poetic lens resonant with Raymond Williams’s structures of

feeling and Bhabha's notion of cultural afterlives. Together, these poems reaffirm—echoing Bharata's rasa theory and Aurobindo's idea of poetry as mantric consciousness—that poetic language remains a potent site where suffering is aestheticised not to soften it, but to render it ethically audible and imaginatively transformative.

The issue also features two incisive book reviews that extend *dialog's* ethical and epistemic concerns through memory, ecology, and affect: the reading of Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* frames planetary consciousness through Keats's "Negative Capability" and Tagore's vision of the human as imbricated within a larger cosmic rhythm, while the review of Sarmistha Dutta Gupta's *The Jallianwala Bagh Journals* foregrounds feminist memory-work and oral historiography to recover women's silenced experiences of colonial trauma. Together, the reviews affirm literature, in Ashis Nandy's sense, as a counter-archive of conscience—resisting erasure, unsettling dominant histories, and sustaining ethical ways of seeing and remembering.

The issue is further strengthened by its engagement with translation as ethical critique, most notably in K. Denish Raja Durai's English rendering of Mu. Metha's *A Street Singer's Homage to a Father of the Nation*, which situates modern Tamil *pudukavithai* within a Marxist-humanist lineage to interrogate postcolonial disillusionment, fractured nationalism, and Gandhian afterlives—recalling Benjamin's claim that translation releases the "afterlife" (*Überleben*) of a text while renewing its political charge. Read alongside the poetic interventions of Sanjukta Dasgupta and Patrick Aura, this translation affirms—echoing Aurobindo's notion of poetry as mantric truth and Ashis Nandy's idea of cultural conscience—that lyric, whether original or translated, remains a vital mode for bearing witness to historical betrayal, ecological precarity, and unfinished freedom.

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