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Summerhill

IIAS Review
Vol. XX, No. 2 (Winter 2014)
ISSN: 0972-1452

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Subscription
Single Issue Rs. 50.00
Annual (Two Issues) Rs. 100.00
Three Years (Six Issues) Rs. 250.00

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Note from the Editor

Albeena Shakil

The two-year Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, have begun. This issue of *Summerhill: IAS Review* appears at this auspicious occasion.

The Institute came into existence with the generous vision of the then President of India, S. Radhakrishnan, and the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The grand Rashtrapati Niwas (formerly the Viceregal Lodge) was bestowed to the Institute. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study Society was registered on 6 October 1964 and the Institute was formally inaugurated on 20 October 1965 by the then President, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Besides the President, the inaugural ceremony was addressed by Dr Zakir Husain, the then Vice-President of the Republic and President of the Society; Sri M.C. Chagla, the then Union Minister of Education and the Chairperson of the Governing Body and Professor Niharranjan Ray, the founding Director of the Institute.

Among very few of its kind across the world, especially in a decolonized nation, the Institute came into existence with the expressed aim to provide a suitable environment for academic research in the humanities, social and natural sciences in India. The Fellows-in-Residence programme was evolved as the core of the Institute. Since then, over four hundred national and international Fellows have undertaken research at IAS in various disciplines. By now, the fellowship programme has expanded to include National, Tagore and regular Fellows alongside periodic visits by Visiting Professors, Visiting Scholars and Guest Scholars. Beside the in-house Institute Press, which publishes research monographs and conference proceedings, the Institute brings out two journals - *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* and *Summerhill: IAS Review*. It has also been a host to numerous conferences, seminars, workshops, study schools and lectures over the years, and houses a richly stocked and vibrant library that has continued to draw interested scholars to the Institute.

The main mandate of research at the Institute has been to promote areas of “deep human significance”

and “inter-disciplinary research”. After fifty years of IAS, questions of advancing the frontiers of knowledge, especially in the humanities and social sciences, remain as relevant as ever. There are many opinions and opinion-holders in the contested terrain of facts and perspectives in the wider society as well as the intellectual world. Perhaps the distinctive feature of the opinions and views evolved by researchers and scholars is that they are based on reasoned negotiation, through extensive and intensive study, of divergent facts and perspectives. While some scholars may engage their efforts in the terrain of facts, others may engage more in the terrain of perspectives and some may engage with both to confirm, refute or advance the archive of knowledge. The measure of good scholarship often is whether it is based on attending to enough relevant facts and enough relevant perspectives instead of merely confining itself to echo chambers or operating in the restricted terrain of received knowledge and rote learning. Diversity within the scholarly community is also of great significance.

In his inaugural address, Professor S. Radhakrishnan laid down his expectations from the Institute – “increasing maturity should express itself in this capacity to understand what other points of view are.” Research at the Institute was envisaged as an attempt to “co-operate, to bring together people, to establish friendship” instead of “talk of enemies, of conflict and war.” It is not surprising that antipathy to research is often expressed by those who wish to ride roughshod over divergent views and are more interested in talk of enmity and conflict. For the success of this experimental Institute, Professor Niharranjan Ray, its founding Director, sought two assurances: “(a) complete academic freedom; and (b) relative freedom from financial worries. Higher learning and research does not want to be interfered with, and an intellectual and seeker of truth who can be made to wait on the pleasures of others, is not certainly worth his salt.” One of the key challenges for contemporary research in the humanities and social sciences is that due to fund and

other constraints it often has to wait on the pleasures of others. IAS, Shimla, in that regard, has weathered many storms, but has strived to retain and safeguard a spirit of free inquiry and research.

This issue of *Summerhill: IAS Review* is neither a review of the Institute nor of the general state of research in the country or the world. The collection presented here is more modest. The first piece involves reminiscences by Prof. Radhavallabh Tripathi about a two-week school organised by him at IAS, Shimla, on Bharata's *Natyashastra* from 26 August to 7 September 2014. Titled "Bharata Returns" the essay is as much about the *Natyashastra* as it is about the vibrant fraternity of scholars who participated in the school. The essay, thus, offers glimpses into the world of research and researchers at IAS through one of its important exercises, that of organising periodic study schools.

If the first piece is about an ancient theory of theatre and its contemporary relevance, the second essay by Prof. A. Achuthan is on the 'Contemporary Experience and Indian Theatre,' covering the extensive multilingual terrain of modern Indian theatre, especially the emergent trends in Dalit-Adivasi, women's and contemporary mythological theatre. Coming from an active theatre practitioner and scholar, the essay will be valuable for anyone seeking to obtain a quick overview of theatre in India today.

In the recent past, the academic community has lost many stalwarts. This issue of *Summerhill* carries two tributes paid by fellows-in-residence to two such scholars. The first is to the towering historian, Prof. Bipan

Chandra, by his former student, Prof. K.L. Tuteja, and the second is to the legendary writer, U.R. Ananthamurthy, by R. Umamaheshwari. Both provide glimpses into the works and lasting impact of such exceptional scholars upon academics and the society at large.

Beside essays, the issue also carries several book reviews as well as information about the latest publications by the Institute. It is hoped that the collection will provide some indication of the vibrant research environment at the Institute.

Besides seminars by National Fellows, Tagore Fellows, Fellows at the Institute and Visiting scholars, in the course of this year, IAS has been involved in organising the following in the second half of 2014: Symposium on 'Interrogating "Swaraj in Ideas"' (21- 22 July 2014); Commemorative Programme on "Remembering Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: Teacher, Philosopher and Institution Builder" (05 September 2014); National Seminar on 'Sexuality and Society in India' (16-18 September 2014); National Seminar on 'Shimla: Harmonizing Colonial Inheritance, Urban Aesthetics and Modernization' (07-08 October 2014); Second Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture by Gulzar Sahib, including inauguration of a new photo gallery at the Rashtrapati Niwas (September 2014); National Seminar on 'The Power of Communication: The Media, Public Space and Participatory Democracy' (13-14 October 2014); National Seminar on 'Idea of Transgression' (27-29 October 2014); National Seminar on 'Disciplines, Movements and Policies: The Changing Relationship between Science, State and Society' (24-25 November 2014).

Bharata Returns: Autumn School on the *Natyashastra*

Radhavallabh Tripathi

Walking amidst the beautiful and serene surroundings of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, I used to wonder whether Bharatamuni with his disciples had inhabited the range of the mountains in the vicinity of this place long ago. The *Natyashastra* of Bharatamuni tells us that he, along with his one hundred sons or disciples, had been practicing theatre in this area and it was here that his discourses on the art of drama and theatre were delivered, which went on to form the corpus of the text of *Natyashastra*.

Though I chose to work on an entirely different area of study for my project at the Institute, fortunately my engagement with Bharata's *Natyashastra* could continue. The Institute accepted my proposal to organise a two-week school on the *Natyashastra*. The basic purpose of the school was to read and understand Bharata's text and this was hopefully going to give me an opportunity to share and improve upon my understanding of this voluminous ancient compendium of a varied and complex nature.

The preparations for the school were underway. Professor Chetan Singh, the Director of the Institute, was taking an active interest, and Kamalji, as its Academic Resource Officer, was also cooperating actively. I was feeling somewhat excited about the event. The notification for inviting applications for the school had been posted on the Institute's website. There had been an overwhelming response from all corners of the country.

The school was to be held from 26 August to 7 September 2014. As the countdown for the programme began, I was more excited and also worried about its success. I knew that it was going to be quite an experiment and a new experience for me. For the first time in the recent history of studies on the *Natyashastra*, this kind of an exercise — to understand the text by a group of specialists drawn from diverse disciplines — was being attempted.

* Professor Radhavallabh Tripathi is a Fellow at IIAS and was the Vice-Chancellor of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, till recently.

Around eighty applicants were desirous of participating in the school. Twenty-seven were initially selected. Of them, nineteen finally turned up. It was a heterogeneous group across different ages and professions. The participants finally came from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry (Pondicherry), Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Punjab and various towns of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

After the issuance of selection letters, we were continuing to receive eager messages and telephone calls from many others who implored and urged upon me to see if they could still be included.

As was usual with all the programmes of the Institute, the inaugural session started on time, at 10 on the morning of 26 August.

There was a distinguished gathering before me. Some were familiar faces. Vidyanand Jha, a renowned Professor of Management at IIM Calcutta, was amongst the participants. I had met him for the first time at the *Mahabharata* school organised by IIAS. We had been in contact since then. He was sent as an expert by the Government of India to evaluate the development schemes of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, which I had been heading as Vice-Chancellor. I was aware of his deep interest and involvement with the classics. I could see Praveen Bhole, an Associate Professor in the Lalit Kala Kendra of the University of Poona. I had met him only a few months back in a seminar on theatre organised by Satish Alekar. He had worked with the great theatre directors of our times like Eugeno Barba, and had also been to Poland to study the theatre of Grotowsky. That Jha and Bhole chose to join this school as participants made my task as convener even more challenging and stimulating. Sujata Mohan and Medini Hombal I had known as scholars of the *Natyashastra* and exponents of Bharatanatyam. Sujata ran her own dance academy and taught at University. I knew Medini's grandfather, Shankar Hombal, and had seen a performance directed by him at Bhopal. Her father, Prechand Hombal, too, was a Professor of Bharatanatyam at BHU. I had interacted

with him on a number of occasions in seminars, and recently had the occasion to see a play directed by him at BHU. The excellent performances by the students of Medini, I had seen only a few days earlier, when I visited her university — the Indira Kala Sangit Vishvidyalaya — as chairman of the Peer Team from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council.

Amongst the rest of the participants, I knew only Sonal Nimbkar, Manoj Mishra and Rishabh Bharadwaj.

“In due consideration to the specializations of this scholarly gathering.... we will forget the distinction between resource persons and participants. There are some participants here who could actually be worthy resource persons for this School. The fact that they have chosen to join this School as participants makes this whole exercise especially meaningful,” I said in my introductory remarks. I also tried to bring out the inadequacy of Realist theatres of Europe and the quest for alternate models in aesthetics and theatre in Asia; and the importance of a text like the *Natyashastra* for understanding a different worldview, the rhythm of life and the holistic approach, which have been lost in the present world.

It is customary in schools and seminars organised under the aegis of the IIAS that after the opening remarks by the Director and introductory remarks or a key note address either by the convener of the programme or by a scholar, the participants are asked to introduce themselves. During introductions, most of the participants explained their reasons for joining the school, with some also reiterating their commitment towards or appreciation for the *Natyashastra*. It was Pravin Bhole who gave a jolt. He said that he was there because he wanted to reject the *Natyashastra* or something similar. I could sense the challenge that lay before me.

I was doubting whether the inaugural session has really set the tone for the school. I have known Prof Chetan Singh, the Director of the Institute, to make very perceptive remarks with his wonderful sense of humour and a touch of intimacy. In his opening remarks, he sought to explore the natural and close relationship between life and theatre. Narrating his own experience of performing drama during his school days, he discussed the complex nature of an actor’s creative process.

The first day went well. As per the schedule, I could complete the teaching of the first and second chapters of the *Natyashastra*. After that, there was lecture by Abhiraj Rajendra Mishra and paper presentations by Akhil Vimal and Malakshmi. By now, I had come to know some of the other participants better. Ravindra Mundhe was visually challenged. He was an extraordinary personality with exceptional achievements. He had done his Masters in Performing Arts twice with different specialisations, M.Phil. in Dramatics and Film Studies and

was pursuing his research work in this very area at the MGAHV, Wardha. There was Shakir Tasnim, a graduate of NSD, who was presently heading the Department of Performing Arts in the Central University of Jharkhand. Dharmakirti Sunmanta had established himself as a script writer and a dramatist. Om Ramchandra Bhutkar was a writer-cum-actor.

In the forenoon sessions, we generally read the text of the *Natyashastra* line by line from its abridged version prepared by me for this occasion. There were lively exchanges and questions as I slowly proceeded to explain the stanzas. This collective exercise was quite stimulating. Earlier, quite a few persons had studied the text with me individually. They were singular seekers of knowledge. Lubna Mariam from Bangladesh was one of them. During her last visit to India, I had told her about this programme. She had expressed keen interest in attending the school on the *Natyashastra* and was willing to even come at her own expense. I had informed her about the advertisement for the *Natyashastra* Autumn School. But she had lately been very busy in organising activities of her theatre-group at Dhaka, and could not come.

During the School, six resource persons delivered lectures on different aspects of the Indian aesthetics, theatre and performance traditions. Rajendra Mishra, former Vice-Chancellor of Sampurnanad Sanskrit University, gave a special lecture after the inaugural session. He presented an overview of the contents of the *Natyashastra*, emphasising the possibilities of their application to modern contexts.

K.S. Rajendran, a dynamic person, committed to his work, delivered six lectures for the school, covering several aspects of theatre performances according to the *Natyashastra*, examining their relevance to modern theatre. Gautam Chatterjee delivered three lectures on *rasa*, *bhāva* and *abhinaya*. He explained the deep and intrinsic nature of basic emotions and their manifestations in performance.

There were also some odds. I was teaching the text for three hours or more daily during the forenoon sessions. For the afternoon sessions, I needed resource persons. I wished Kamaleshdatta Tripathi ji could come, but he had personal problems. K.G. Palause expressed regret at the last moment. Luckily, all the afternoons were buzzing with activity — especially the lectures by resource persons like Rajendran, Mahesh Champaklal, Gautam Chatterji or Bharata Gupta. The evenings were occupied with programmes like film shows or theatre performances directed by K.S. Rajendran, Kavalam Panikkar, Padma Subrahmanyam or Bhumikesh Singh. The liveliest were the live performances by Sujata Mohan, Sonal Nimbkar and Medini Hombal. A documentary film

on the *Natyashastra* titled *Pancham Veda*, produced and directed by Gautam Chatterjee, was screened during the school.

My plan to organise an evening of musical recital based on the system of music expounded in the *Natyashastra*, however, suffered a setback at the last moment. I had banked upon Sanjay Dwivedi, who was to come as a participant. But just a day before the inauguration, he communicated his inability to come. He had worked on the *Natyashastra* for his Ph.D. under my supervision. Trained in classical music in the tradition of Kumar Gandharv, he was emerging as a doyen of music. He would have enthralled the select audience at the School. I had earlier arranged an evening of music recital by him on the occasion of another School on Abhinavagupta at the IAS itself, and remember how Kamleshdatta Tripathi ji had appreciated him.

I had included a dhrupad recital by Sangita Gundecha and rendering of some compositions by Chinmayi to felicitate Sanjay Dwivedi's performance. Now that he was not coming, I saw no point in holding the music programme as a part of the School on the *Natyashastra*. A notice for cancellation was being issued, but then I had an afterthought. Chinmayi, my daughter, was coming anyway and Sangita was also available. An evening of music could still be arranged in a different way. Luckily, the Fellows Council of Institute agreed to host this programme.

Mahesh Champaklal gave me a pleasant surprise by offering to deliver three lectures. He was set to join the Institute as a Fellow soon. He obliged me by arranging a visit to the Institute on his own. His three lectures outlined the three phases of the revival of Sanskrit theatre in modern times, namely, the phase of Western realistic oriented performances, the phase of performances based on the *Natyashastra* and the phase of contemporary experiments based on regional traditional theatre terms. He also established the relevance of the *Natyashastra* for modern production techniques. I re-discovered the talents of Bhumikesh Singh on this occasion, known for his experiments with *Chhau*. He amazed all of us by displaying the viability of the form for the performance of Sanskrit plays. He also demonstrated scenes from his own performances of *Bhāsa* plays. An evening of his demonstration-cum-lecture on the applications of *Chhau* was extremely stimulating.

We had a poetry recital session. I had requested Vidyanand Jha to engage in a session of his poems. His collection of Maithili poems published by the Sahitya Akademi was recently discovered by me in the Institute library. As an afterthought, I also remembered Rajesh Joshi, whom I had earlier requested to chair the paper presentation session of Sangita Gundcha. Sangita lived in Bhopal and Rajesh ji already knew her. But Sangita could finally not manage to join the school, so I had to inform him of the cancellation of her presentation. Now, I asked him to come for reciting his poems. At the eleventh hour

I also remembered that I should not forget that I was also a poet of some sorts.

The poetry recital was a good change. After the presentation of poems in Maithili, Sanskrit and Hindi by Vidyanand Jha, myself and Joshi ji, two of the participants felt inspired to present their compositions. Shakir Tasnim in Urdu and Mundhe in Hindi.

Bharat Gupt was also a man of rare specialisations. Only two stalwarts had made the attempt to master and practice the system of music as given by Bharata in his *Natyashastra* – Acharya Kailash Chandra Brihaspati and Pundit Onkar Nath Thakur. Premlata Sharma was a worthy disciple of Pundit Onkarnatha Thakur, and she had been working on music in the *Natyashastra*. Unfortunately, she was no more. Bharat was the only disciple of Acharya Brihaspati. The lectures by him covered authentic explanations of the musical system envisaged in the *Natyashastra*. He offered elaborate accounts of ancient musical scales and melodies, and provided details of how the grammar of Indian music envisaged by Bharata differed from the present Hindustani or Karnatak music. He also explained the meaning of many technical terms and concepts as well as their relationship with *bhavas* and *rasas*.

There were several thought-provoking discussions and presentations by the participants of the school. Pravin Bhole presented a paper on 'The Principles of Theatre Anthropology and the Technique of Angika Abhinaya in Sanskrit Plays'. He examined the categories of abhinaya in the *Natyashastra* from the perspective of modern concepts of theatre anthropology, and presented an interesting study of the systems of the *Natyashastra* on the basis of the principles of balance, opposition and consistent-inconsistency. He also discussed how the systems of the *Natyashastra* could provide insights and a new lease of life to today's performances. His second presentation was on '*Abhinaya as described in the Natyashastra and Cognitive Neuroscience*'. He outlined an ambitious project of investigating the neurological effects of the physical gesticulations described in the *Natyashastra* on the performers. This would involve the use of science and theory to support practical tools for contextualising theatre practices. He emphasised the need to de-mystify the systems of the *Natyashastra* and view them in the context of developments in cognitive neuroscience, with studies at the intersection of biology and cognition.

I now think that perhaps Bhole did not mean to reject the *Natyashastra* as such (as he threatened in the inaugural session). Possibly he just wanted to question the mythological aura and glorification of the *Natyashastra*. Sri Maha Lakshmi presented her paper titled, "*Natyashastra as a Pañcamaveda*", while Akhila Vimal, in her paper "*Pañcamaveda: Heterogeneity and the Problematic of*

Spectatorship of Asuras and Śūdras” discussed the idea of othering and subaltern discourse in the *Natyashastra*.

The demonstration-cum-lectures were very exciting. Medini Hombal gave a demonstration-cum-lecture on the preliminaries that used to be performed before the start of any play. The performance of Bharatantyam by Sonal Nimbkar was an example of the combination of classical grandeur with innovative skills. Sujata Mohan in her demonstration-cum-lecture showed how the adoption of the techniques of *abhinaya* from the *Natyashastra* led to evolution of the new form of Bharatanrityam by Padma Subrahmanyam, her guru.

It was already 7 September, the last day of the school. I had come to the last chapter of the *Natyashastra* – and was reading the last line of the *Natyashastra* by Bharata, which says – “Whatever that has been left out by me, Kohala – one of my disciples – will deal with it in a sequel to my text.” Explaining the line and briefly introducing Kohala, finally I was telling the gathering – “I have tried to explain the *Natyashastra* to you in the best possible way I could... despite my limitations...’

Something very unexpected happened as I said this. All the participants arose clapping, and they continued clapping for nearly two minutes. I was somewhat overwhelmed and taken aback, managing to utter only “oh no!” – or something like that in a confused tone. I was aware of their appreciation and the sympathetic hearing they had given to me during the past thirteen days, but frankly I had not expected such a standing ovation from them.

In the valedictory session held in the afternoon of 7 September 2014, participants narrated experiences of benefit from the School. Fortunately, Bharat Gupt was still here from among the resource persons. I had requested him to speak at the valedictory. He described the School as an event of historical importance. Presenting the resume, I hoped that the outcome of the School would gradually come to reflect in redesigning of the syllabi of various courses in departments of performing arts, literature, drama, aesthetics and theatre; and that this would hopefully lead to a reconstruction of Indian aesthetics and a re-organisation of the methods of actor-training. Vidyanand Jha, Shakir Tasnim, Sujata Mohan and Pravin Bhole spoke as representatives of the participants and as expected they said very generous things about the entire School. Chetan Singh especially came for the valedictory of our school, as the Institute was closed for Saturday. He emphasised the need for organising such schools in a wider cross-cultural perspective.

The School of *Natyashastra* had come an end. But then, it is not the end.

Coming out of the conference room of Siddhartha Vihar, the venue of the Autumn School, I felt utterly exhausted. I wished to just put aside the notes and reading materials assiduously prepared for the school for some time, and from tomorrow onwards, if not from today, return to my project work as a Fellow of the Institute. I wanted to forget the school of *Natyashastra*. It must have been a great event, but I had a life beyond it... so I must now get on with it!

But will Bharatamuni allow me to do that? He continues to come back to me. The memories of the school also continue to come back. I may remember all the participants of this school till the end of this life of mine, like the students of the earliest days of my lecturership at University. There were two research scholars from JNU amongst the participants of the school – both young women. One of them was outspoken and very talkative, the other somewhat reserved, always speaking in hushed tones. I will remember both of them for their verbosity as well as silence. In fact, the latter did not speak during the entire course of the school at all, even though I allowed considerable liberty to the participants to speak out and put up questions during my sessions and as a result there was also some loose talking. But this research scholar was the only one to remain silent. Was her silence a comment on the functioning of the school? I will remember Shiv Shankar Pathak for his resounding voice and the way he demonstrated dialogue deliveries of some of the characters in the Sanskrit plays he had performed – he could become an Amarish Puri, if not a Shombhu Mitra. I will remember Manoj Mishra for rediscovering his talent in music, and Vidyanand Jha, now for his Maithili Poetry and also added appreciation for his magnanimity as a person.

Most of the participants of the school have been contacting me over the several months after the School; but I have now lost the trail of contact with Vidyanand Jha and Pravin Bhole. Obviously, both of them are very busy, and like the younger participants, may not have time to write to me; or perhaps they may also want to forget about the school just as I had wanted after the valedictory; or was the school eventually not worthwhile enough for them? These and many other question will remain unresolved – and in their being un-explicit, Bharatamuni will be coming back to me again.

Contemporary Experience and Indian Theatre

A. Achuthan

Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study Shimla

New forms or expressions are not born from a Zero. They retain something of the old form from which they came. The very nature of theatre demands this continuity. We have a very fertile tradition of 'Lok' — 'desi' dramatic performances, along with traditional classical Sanskrit theatre — 'Koodiyattam', the only surviving classical theatre along with *Chaturvidha-abhinaya* and modern theatre. Many theatre personalities have already discussed about Indian theatre in detail, including 'how national our theatre is', etc. Scholars are of the opinion that there is no single Indian theatre because contemporary Indian theatrical concerns are related to the life of the people of the land at many different levels. By now, we have twenty-nine states in India. The dramatic expressions of different regions, economic classes, social and cultural positions of the people, actually all comprise Indian concerns. Indian theatre may probably be defined by noting these different expressions and analysing the inter-connectedness of cultural expressions. As Amilcar Cabral said:

"Whatever may be the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and it reflects the organic nature of the society..."¹

I will now try to analyse the contemporary experiences of the people and the happenings in Indian theatre. We know that a different type of politics emerged for the first time in Indian theatre (admitting the importance of *Lokadharmi* and *Natyadharmi* traditions) towards the end of the colonial period — plays like *Neel Darpan*, *Nabanna* in Bengali theatre; and *Kottukrishi*, *Pattabakki*, *Ningalenne Communistakki* and plays of KPAC in Malayalam theatre featured the peasantry and its struggles, and marked a movement towards more left oriented politics in theatre. Actually, IPTA and Jana Natya Manch's series

of streetplays were acts of political theatre in India. This trend left a deep impact. It is to be noted that even now we are following the same 'Dramatic Performances Act', which was framed by the British in 1876 after the historic production of *Neel Darpan* in Bengal. It is the living example of cultural and political resistance of the people. But for the last few decades, politics in theatre has taken a different turn towards more down to earth positions and expressions. There have been innovations in the uses of language in theatre, Dalit and Adivasi theatre, women's theatre and mythological representation in theatre. These comprise some major significant expressions in contemporary Indian theatre.

We all know that early dramatic language was influenced by Elizabethan drama. But slowly it came very close to 'actual speech' in the plays of Rabindranath Tagore, Badal Sarkar, Utpal Dutta in Bengali; Vijay Tendulkar, Dutta Bhagat in Marathi; Mohan Rakesh, Habeeb Tanveer in Hindi; Adya Rangacharya and Girish Karnad in Kannada; Sreekandan Nair, G. Sankarapillai, Kavalam Narayana Panikar in Malayalam; etc. These theatre artistes/writers tried to acquire actual speech. It is a fact that economy of words was unknown to several theatrical traditions in India. What the new theatre movements did was to explore fully the concept of silence in theatre. By now, contemporary theatre has reserved a prime place for sound and silence. Classical Indian semantics speaks of 'shabda', the word, as 'nitya' (constant); and 'artha', the meaning, as 'anitya' (changing impermanent). We can see that contemporary Indian drama and theatre have demonstrated the impermanence of meaning. Badal Sarkar's *Ebang Indrajit*, *Pagla Ghoda* (Bengali), Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal*, *Sakharam Binder* (Marathi), Adya Rangacharya's *Sunojanamejay* and Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* (Kannada); Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure*, *Dhwani Natak*, *Beej Natak* and Dharamvir Bharati *Andha Yug* (Hindi); G. Sankara Pillai's *Karuthadaivoathe Thedi* and Kavalam Narayana Panikar's *Puranadi*, K.J. Baby's *Nadugaddika* (Malayalam);

Shivkumar Joshi's *Kahat Kabira*, Shanta Gandhi's *Jasma Odan* (Gujrati); Manoranjan Das's *Aranya Fasal* (Oriya); etc. are some of the plays that display this tendency.

The whole structure of values associated with a given word or meaning was subverted in such plays. As a result, most theatre artistes and personalities began to think about 'the word in the play' — what were the cultural meanings that words necessarily carried? Consequently, new acting styles and new styles of speech emerged. In Ebrahim Alkazi's production of *Tughlaq*, actor Manohar Singh; in Dubey's production of *Andha Yug*, Amrish Puri; and Shriram Lagoo in *Gidhade* acted in a new style. Sombhu Mitra did the same for Rabindranath Tagore's texts and the great theatre director B.V. Karanth did it with Jaishankar Prasad's *Skandagupta*. Chandravadan Mehta in Gujarati, Rattan Theyyam and Kanhailal in Manipuri, Professor Ramanujan in Tamil and Malayalam, and Rajinder Nath, M.K. Raina in Hindi were experimenting with the same thing in their respective national theatres and languages. In their experiments, the word did not change its meaning but found itself in a new setting.

After some time, Bertolt Brecht was put to the rescue — to liberate us from normal theatre. But the sense of liberation was short lived. Brecht's political use of theatre was missed here altogether in favour of a return to folk traditions, in search of identity. That is why, in 1970s, most of our contemporary theatre artists began to think about the roots or identity of our theatre, which paved the way for a 'Niji Rangmanch' or 'The Theatre of Roots' movement. Playwrights like Habeeb Tanveer, Kavalam Narayana Panikar, Vasant Kanetkar, Madhukar, Arun Mukherjee, N. Prabhakaran, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Girish Karnad, Chandrashekhara Kambara; and directors like B.V. Karanth, Satyadev Dubey, Ram Gopal Bajaj, Shanta Gandhi, Rattan Theyyam, etc. used different folk dramatic forms of their respective regions for meaningful, communicative and creative expression.

Even though we had Dalit folk songs, *Nritta* and *Nritya* in good numbers, the Dalits and Adivasis found their voice in Indian theatre between the 1960s and the 1970s in a new language and grammar with the *Ambedkari Jalsa* movement in Maharashtra (M.B. Chitnis' 'Yugyatra'). Dalit theatre was formulating a different language and grammar for the expression of the downtrodden and it soon spread all over India. *Kirvant* by Premanand Gajvi, *Teesri Aankh* by Jyotiba Phule, *Wata Palwata* by Datta Bhagat, *Bamabvada* by Ramnath Chouhan (Marathi); *Rama Rajya*, *Mayanand Balidan*, *Shambuk* by Swami Achyutanand Harihar, *Antim Avarodh* by N.R. Sagar, *Antaheen Bediyan*, *Dharma Parivartan* by Mata Prasad, *Sach Kahnevala Shoodra Hai* by Sooraj Pal Chauhan, *Mandir Pravesha*, *Do Chera* by Om Prakash Valmiki, *Hello Comrade* by Mohandas Nemishray, *Nanga Satya* by Suśilā akabhaure, *Aaj ka*

Drawn by Sreekanth Vyas, *Court Martial* by Swadesh Deepak (Hindi); *Baba Bantu*, *Swami Ji* by Charan Dass Sidhu; *Jwar Bhatta* by Harbans Lal Vardhan, *Kaljug Rath Agni Ka* by Gurdial Singh Phull, *Sooki Kokh*, *Ik Ramayan hor* by Ajmer Singh Aulakh, *Dalit Daasata*, *Sach ki Low*, *Dalit Enkalab* by S.L. Viridi (Punjabi); *Madayan Sambook Maharshi Ka Maha Bhashan* by Kuvempu, *Harijana Vana* by Sriranga, C.K.S.'s BeeChi plays (Kannada); *Paleru* by Boyi Bhimanna, *Kulam Tolipatte* by G. Kalyan Rao, *Braksha Vai Su Pamam* by Pydi Teresh Babu, *Dalit Deputy Collector* by Roop Narayan Sonkar, *Rajya Griha Pravesam* by Patti Bandana Anand Rao (Telugu), *Baalaakalesam* by Pandit Karuppan, *Nadugaddika* by K.J. Baby, *Uratti* by Manoj Kanai (Malayalam); *Ambedkar* by K.A. Gunasekaran, *Molaga Podi* by Sreejith Sundaram (Tamil) are some of the productions in Indian theatre that addressed the problems of Dalits and Adivasis of contemporary India directly. Jyotiba Phule, Premanand Gajvi, Datta Bhagat, N.R. Sagar, Om Prakash Valmiki, Swadesh Deepak, Gurdial Singh, Guna Sekharam, Sreejith Sundaram, Perumal Murugan, K.J. Baby, Pandit K.P. Karuppan are the typical writers who have taken the initial anguish of Dalit-Adivasi life to greater level of introspection and recognition. Through their fascinating and meaningful expressions, they opened up the dark places where Indian politics happens. It is to be noted that in 1931, Pandit Karuppan introduced Kochal Pulayan — the first Dalit character in his play — 'Baalaakalesam' in modern Malayalam theatre.

The plays of Sriranga in Karnataka not only spoke of the desire for social justice, but also gave due consideration to new political thought. His early play *Harijanavada* is the best example. The play was constructed in a plural structure. There were multiple narratives, each conflicting with each other. The play demonstrates the opening of temple doors to Harijans. Samudaya's two significant productions in Karnataka — 'Belchi' and 'Patre Sangappa' — became iconic representations of the socio-cultural movement. The implementation of the Karnataka *Land Reforms Act* in 1976 had turned villages into killing fields. The Dalits were harassed and brutally killed by the Zamindars. *Belchi*, a play by C.K.S, narrates the death of a Dalit in a remote village. Belchi is a village near Patna in Bihar. This play, when performed in Karnataka, received a very good response. The play became a weapon of protest in the hands of the oppressed and the Dalits to question the systems of power politics. The same energy was witnessed in Kerela when K.J. Baby's *Nadugaddika* was performed by the Adivasis. All the Adivasi artists were arrested by the state. The same spirit was evident in Andhra Pradesh, during the production of *Kulam-Bhoomi Bhagwata* and *Dalit Deputy Collector*. Even now, the creative artists and theatre practitioners from this

community are struggling and demanding for a new social order and social justice through their expressions and political understanding.

Ashvini Kumar Pankaj, Shyam Sunder Mehta, Mahadev Toppo from Jharkhand; Sukracharya Rabha from Assam; Arun Narayan and Sasikala from Bihar; Raju Das and Nandidass from Bengal; Ashutosh Pothander from Bengaluru, Sreejith Sundaram and Perumal from Tamil Nadu; Sambhaji Bhagat and Anil Sapkal from Maharashtra; Denchanala Srinivas from Hyderabad, are extending the spirit of togetherness and equality through contemporary Indian theatrical expressions. Productions like 'Ambedkar Aur Gandhi' and 'Court Marshal' by Arvind Gaur; 'Fevicol' by Jeetrai Hansda; 'Dharti Aaba' by Hrishikesh Sulabh; 'Uratti' by Manoj Kana are especially notable for their questioning of the established notions of theatre and their focus on the conflicts of life and power struggles.

Like Dalit-Adivasi theatre, women's theatre, too, is questioning established conventions of theatre, and therefore, naturally, facing some hostility from well-entrenched theatre establishment. It is also true that the language and grammar of women's theatre is still in the making. Not all of this theatre is fully accepted or understood by the audiences yet, which has also to do with viewing habits. But we have to admit that these are very exciting developments in theatre and promise to be enriching, intense and more participatory in nature. The world of women, lacking opportunity of expression in the outward arena, is full of dreams, memories and a very rich inner life. So, most of the productions are full of images that appear disconnected but actually have a deep connection in the overall context of the experience they are exploring – the expressions of female inner-voice. Women playwrights and directors, by defying the expected notions of logic or rationality, are allowing themselves to explore the same narrative at a different level. Even if they appear contradictory, women feel that contradictions allow full narratives to unfold their fuller lives.

Such a fertile women's theatre is unfolding in contemporary Indian/regional theatre. Vijaya Mehta (writer-director-actor), Sai Paranjpye (director), Sudha Karmarkar (children's theatre), Pratima Kulkarni (director), Jyoti Subhash (director) of Marathi theatre; Dina Pathak (IPTA), Mitra U. Dutta (Maina gurgari); Lo Bhava (Rangali) introduced new characters - Shanta Gandhi (actor-director-writer) - Jesma Ooden, Shakuntalam, Skantagupta, Mallika Sarabhai – Draupadi, Peter Book and Adith Desai of Gujrati theatre; Anuradha Kapur (director), Kirti Jain (director), Amal Allana (director), Tripurari Sharma (director), Anamika Haksar (director), Mala Hashmi (actor-director-writer), Sushila Takbhaure,

Sasikala (Bihar) Hindi; Usha Ganguly (director-actor), Namidas from (Bengala Theatre) are national level women theatre practitioners who are exploring women's identity in theatre in different ways. In the same way, in Kerala too, women theatre writers, directors and artists are deeply engaging in struggles for women's identity in theatre. Productions by Nireeksha theatre group of E. Rajarajeswari and C.V. Sudhi, like *Pravachaka*, *Aanungal Illatha Pennungal*; Sajitha Madathil's theatre group Abhinethri's production like *Beauty Parlour*; K.V. Sreeja's productions like *Prasava Muri*, *Kalamkariyude Katha*, *Oru Sthreepaksha Natakam* are some of the significant productions of Malayalam women's theatre.

Prasanna Ramaswamy's production based on C. S. Lakshmi's *Ambai* and *Karuppu Kuthirai Chadukkam* is notable. Prasanna called her play *Porukka Mattom...* *Porukka Mattom* (we shall not forgive,... we shall not forgive). The plot was based on an incident of police brutalisation of a young widow, Rosa, in Maharashtra, and was adapted to reflect public protests against the incident through the intervention of the media. The women's group *Paatini* and the theatre repertory of *Koothu-p-pattarai* collaborated to stage this play. The presentation was very different, in the sense, that it had several narrators with different ideologies who fought for the cause. The multiple narrators were collectively transforming themselves into dramatic personae. The play was performed in a police colony and was banned from being shown anywhere else in the city. The irony was that a woman police officer, Ms. Thilakavathi, wanted Prasanna to stage this play. But when it was performed, they found it very difficult to digest. It probably proves that even having women at the helm of affairs does not always help the cause of women. The significance of this play was that it was probably for the first time that such a bold play was performed ("Porukka Mattom... Porukka Mattom," *Indian Theatre*, May 2002, p.107)

Like this, mythological expressions in plays are also a net result of our contemporary experiences. Myths carry socio-cultural experiences and values and are not mere imaginative productions of societies or communities. Myths, both oral and written, express many dimensions, so they have to be understood rather as cultural and political statements; and at the same time as intellectual and creative interrogations of existing value systems. For example, we can take Dritharashtra and Gandhari of *Andha Yug* by Dharamveer Bharthi. In contemporary period, the text of the play has to be recognised as a creative negotiation with the past, for the past cannot be dissolved absolutely. The play announces its continued presence at various levels in present times. *Tughlaq* by Girish Karnad, *Ghashiram Kotwal* by Vijay Tendulkar, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* by Mohan Rakesh, *Karuthadaivathe*

Thedi by G. Sankara Pillai, *PuraNadi* by K.N. Panikkar are some of the noted plays of this kind. Another play which I want to discuss here is *Shudra Tapasvi* (1944) by the great Kannada writer, Kuvempu, because it dealt with the fundamental issue of the caste system in the Indian society. The nature of the caste system, the role of nation/state/king and the value-traditions were discussed in the play. Kuvempu asserted that the Uttara Kanda of the *Ramayana* had many interpolations. The killing of Shambuka by Rama was wholly untenable. Kuvempu not only upheld the legitimacy of Shambuka Tapa, but also made the Brahmin, who lost the son and complained to Rama about the Shudra Tapaswi, gain knowledge of the self. Kuvempu not only attacked the caste-centric consciousness of the Brahmin, but also re-located the text and its protagonist. Kuvempu asserted that Bhavabhuti in his *Uttara Rama Charita* had already attacked the unjust punishment given to Shambuka. In Kuvempu's text, it was the Brahmin who had to undergo the process of purification from his caste prejudice and arrogance. Moreover, the arrows that Rama shot, fell at the feet of Shambuka and returned to pursue the Brahmin who now

pleaded for his life. Rama, as a Dharmik king, proved to the public that he had the wisdom and courage to establish the truth. No doubt, texts like this will enable us to find alternative ways of reading and understanding literature and to assert social and cultural values and political positions.

In short, in Dalit-Adivasi theatre, women's theatre and contemporary mythological expressions, we can see the changing social and cultural values of the Indian society and how creative artistes are addressing these problems in a very positive way. It is to be noted that with due exploration of world theatre, contemporary Indian theatre is also experimenting with word, space and style of productions, etc. and really attempting a synthesis of our traditions and contemporary experiences in order to create a new visual mother language and grammar of theatre.

Note

1. Amilcar Cabral –Janam. *People's Art in the Twentieth Century: Theory and Practice*, Delhi: Jana Natya Manch, 2000, p. 256.

The Indelible Bipan Chandra (1928-2014)

K.L. Tuteja

Professor Bipan Chandra, a distinguished historian, legendary teacher and one of the leading intellectuals of recent times passed away at the age of 86 on 30 August 2014 after a prolonged illness. His death is deeply mourned by a large number of his students, admirers and friends both in India and abroad. He was born in 1928 at Kangra of the undivided Punjab, which is now a part of Himachal Pradesh. Bipan, as he was popularly known among his friends and admirers, completed school education at his hometown and later graduated from the famous Forman Christian College, Lahore. Afterwards, he went to Stanford University in the US and did Masters in History. Bipan worked for his Ph. D. at Delhi University under the supervision of Professor Bishashwar Prasad and was awarded a degree in 1959. Bipan began his teaching career by joining as lecturer at Hindu College, Delhi in early 1950s and after some years shifted as Reader to the Department of History at Delhi University. From there, he moved to the newly established Jawaharlal Nehru University as Professor in the early 1970s. It would not be wrong to say that Bipan and some of his other eminent colleagues such as S. Gopal, Romila Thapar and Satish Chandra were largely instrumental in making the Centre for Historical Studies of JNU a premier department for the teaching and research in history in the country. After his retirement, JNU honoured Bipan by appointing him as Professor Emeritus, which was clearly in recognition of his scholarship and also the distinct contributions made by him in the field of modern Indian history. Bipan was the General President of the Indian History Congress held at Amritsar in 1985. The UGC appointed him National Professor in 2007. He was also chairman of the prestigious National Book Trust from 2004 to 2012. In 2010, the Government of India conferred on Bipan the prestigious Padma Bhushan award for his contributions

in the field of literature and education. During his last days, Bipan, despite his failing health, remained engaged in historical research and tried his best to complete some of his unfinished projects.

Bipan taught history to several generations of students in his long teaching career of about 43 years. As a passionate and dedicated teacher, he was very popular among his students from the very beginning. In late 1960s, at Delhi University, the classes of two teachers, i.e., Bipan and his friend, Randhir Singh were always fully packed with students with some students from other departments invariably found standing in the corridors listening to their lectures. Bipan's former students at JNU also fondly recall how his lectures, which were always intellectually stimulating and rich in content, would often generate long and serious debates with him for hours. At times, he was found deeply engaged in discussions with his students at the cafeteria, and sometimes even at his residence till the late hours of night. Bipan's primary concern as a teacher was to always shape the thinking process of his students, which could help them to reflect upon and understand historical reality in a correct and scientific manner. However, he never imposed his own opinions upon his students and always gave them the freedom to maintain their own viewpoint on issues of historical debates. Indeed, Bipan was truly a legendary teacher.

Bipan spent about fifty years or so of his life doing research in historical studies. During this period, he wrote 15 books and a large number of articles on a wide range of themes broadly related to modern Indian history. But before going to Bipan's contributions as a historian, it is worth recalling how he grew to be one of the leading Marxist historians of the country. To begin with, it seems that some of Bipan's ideas during the formative stages were evolved as an undergraduate student at Lahore, which needless to say, was intellectually a very vibrant centre in the whole of north India in pre-Independence times. Later, at Stanford, he became seriously engaged in

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the study of Marxist philosophy and pursued it with all seriousness for the rest of his life. Bipan, in a conversation with me, shared that after his return from the USA, he used to travel frequently from his hometown to Shimla in search of Marxist literature at the Dwarka Das Library which, after the Partition had shifted there from Lahore. Later in Delhi, he developed a strong bond with some contemporary Marxists and also organised a Marxist Study circle which was attended by some likeminded intellectuals and activists of Delhi University. Bipan was also a member of the undivided Communist Party of India for a short period of time. During those days, Bipan started a journal called *Enquiry* which carried serious debates on a variety of issues broadly relevant from a left perspective. In particular, the essays published in *Enquiry* by some of the leading historians such as Irfan Habib and others made a major contribution to the growth of Marxist historiography in the country. It is important to note that Bipan did not approach Marx or Marxism as a dogmatic believer. This was quite evident from one of his seminal essays in which he forcefully argued that Marx's analysis of colonialism was not sufficiently adequate for comprehending the complexities of British Imperialism in India. Moreover, Bipan in his later writings also expressed his disagreement with traditional Marxist historian R.P. Dutt, who believed that the struggle against British rule in India was essentially a movement of nationalist bourgeoisie. However, what was important, was the fact, that Bipan remained essentially a firm believer of Marxism as a tool for interpreting history.

It is well known that Bipan wrote extensively on different aspects of the Indian national movement with authority and passion. The foremost among them was his doctoral work entitled 'Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India', which was published in 1966. Based on massive empirical data, this path breaking study of the economic ideas of early Indian nationalists from 1880 to 1905 was superbly rich in content as well as theoretical perspective. Bipan convincingly argued that the early nationalists were serious minded intellectuals having deep concern for the Indian nation and were not mendicants or petitioners, as they were described by some contemporaries as well as later writers. His study established in a comprehensive manner that these nationalists, largely through their writings and speeches, made a powerful critique of the economic policies followed by the British as a colonial power, which resulted in long term poverty of India as a subordinate country. In other words, Bipan's study, written with a broad Marxian approach, underlined that the early nationalists not only deciphered the exploitative character of colonial rule, but also clearly underscored the contradictions that existed

between the British metropolis and the Indian people, irrespective of class, caste and regional differentiations. Therefore, according to Bipan, nationalism in India was not a cultural phenomenon or just an "imagination", but "basically a product of central or primary contradiction of colonial India, the contradiction between colonialism and the interest of the Indian people."

In 1985, Bipan wrote a long essay titled, "The Long Term Dynamics: Gandhiji and Indian National Movement", which he delivered as Presidential Address at the Indian History Congress, that was later incarnated also as a monograph. In this essay, he offered a fresh interpretation of the national movement, which appeared to many, a major shift in his position as a Marxist historian. So far, Bipan, like a number of orthodox Marxists, had maintained that the Congress leadership, despite their anti-imperialist perspective, were not able to come out of bourgeois constraints and therefore failed to give a radical character to the struggle against the British, both in form and content. This perspective, as Bipan believed at that time, was best reflected in P-C-P (pressure-compromise-pressure) strategy followed by the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi. In the early 1980s, Bipan, along with his team of scholars from JNU, carried out intensive research on the subject especially by interviewing about 3000 persons all over the country who were in the past associated with the Gandhian movement in one way or the other. On the basis of this extensive research, and also keeping in mind Antonio Gramsci's theoretical framework that underlined the relevance of the 'war of position' as a strategy in a revolutionary struggle, he revised his earlier position and forcefully argued that Mahatma Gandhi actually led a multi-class revolutionary struggle and thereby gradually eroded the semi-hegemonic/hegemonic position of the colonial state in India and finally succeeded in overthrowing it. He now described the Gandhian movement in a more sympathetic manner as S-T-S (struggle-truce-struggle) strategy, which according to him not only suited a long drawn and non-violent struggle, but also truly reflected in the spirit of resistance that slowly gained strength among the Indian masses under the leadership of Gandhi all over the country. He almost went to the extent of suggesting that Gandhi was as much a revolutionary as were Lenin or Mao Tse Tung. In other words, Bipan distanced himself from the traditional Marxist view that Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of the Congress were essentially handmaid of the Indian bourgeoisie. Moreover, Bipan's work was a forceful rejection of the position taken by the famous Cambridge school of historians, who in their writings, had consciously denied anti-colonial consciousness that was fast gaining strength among the Indian masses and

described the Indian national movement more in terms of struggle for power between different sections of elite. Some Marxist historians did not agree with Bipan's revised analysis of the Gandhian movement, but at the same time found it difficult to ignore his interpretation altogether.

Bipan was a strong believer in secularism and throughout his life opposed communalism both as an activist and an intellectual. He firmly believed that a correct and scientific interpretation of history was necessary to fight against communal forces in present times. As part of this belief, Bipan, in association with Romila Thapar and Harbans Mukhia, published a small booklet titled, *Communalism and Writing of Indian History*, and succinctly argued that communalism was essentially a product of modern times, and its believers drew ideological strength from communal interpretation of history. Later, Bipan published a major work titled, *Communalism in Modern India*, in which he critically explored this phenomenon as an ideology that developed as a counter polarity to nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to him, while nationalism was a true reflection of the urges and aspirations of the Indian people belonging to different regions, classes and groups; communalism, based on a false consciousness of historical issues, instead of furthering the real interests and concerns of the groups, which defined themselves as religious communities, merely gave them an illusory sense of fulfillment. Undoubtedly, this characterisation of communalism brought out a basic aspect of the phenomenon in pre-Independence period, particularly its character as an instrument in the hands of colonial rulers to weaken the challenge of the national liberation movement and as a potent weapon used by the socially and economically dominant classes to dupe and exploit the common masses in the pursuit of their own reactionary policies. Bipan, like Jawaharlal Nehru, underlined that communal consciousness being false and illusory had to

be broken and transcended for the growth of India as a secular and composite nation.

Bipan is fondly remembered by a large section of Indians spread all over the country, who read his famous textbook on modern India published by the NCERT in the early 1970s for students of senior secondary classes. This textbook also became extremely popular among college students and general readers, since it offered a comprehensive as well as analytical account of the British rule in India and the anti-colonial struggle. It is important to mention that despite the withdrawal of Bipan's textbook by the NCERT in 2001, its academic relevance as well as popularity has never been undermined. I wish to recall here what Somnath Chatterjee, former speaker of the Lok Sabha, said in 2005 to an audience of Indian diaspora at Port of Spain, Trinidad, while introducing Bipan who was also present there: "A large generation of Indians have grown reading Bipan Chandra's textbook in history and other writings and in this manner he is responsible in shaping the historical consciousness of the Indian nation in the true sense of the term."

It is sad that Bipan could not complete a monograph which he was writing on the life and ideas of Bhagat Singh. However, in one of his long essays and in popular writings, he forcefully contended that Bhagat Singh was not just a romantic revolutionary, but a Marxist thinker in the making. In one of his lectures organised by the ICHR in 2010, Bipan forcefully underlined that "what was more important in the case of Bhagat Singh was not what he actually did but what he was capable of doing." Indeed, Bipan's assessment of Bhagat Singh was profound. As head of the National Book Trust, Bipan made a qualitative improvement in its publication programme, giving special attention to subjects relevant to the social and national perspective.

Indeed, Bipan led a purposeful life and left indelible imprints as a historian, teacher, thinker, activist and above all, a humanist.

Remembering U.R. Ananthamurthy (1932-2014)

R. Umamaheshwari

Addressing students and faculty as the Chief Guest of the 40th Foundation Day of the Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore in the month of October 2013, Udupi Rajagopalacharya Ananthamurthy (or U.R. Ananthamurthy, henceforth, U.R.) spoke of the “three hungers of our time”.¹ The first hunger, he said, is the “hunger for equality” and here he located exemplars such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Mandela, whose essential fight was that for equality. “We shall overcome”, he went on to add, was the most moving prayer in the world, which still brought tears to his eyes. The second great hunger was the hunger for modernity. “All old traditions, or the young in the old traditions are attracted to modernity; I mean not the modern world system but modernity as a state of mind.” He said that the passion for English came along with the passion for modernity. The third hunger was “spiritual hunger”. “People who have a hunger for god turn to spirituality without a religion or a prophet...All these hungers are connected with the hunger for equality...In our times...to develop any new thought you have to develop a critique of technology and science and a critique of development...You can create real excellence only through equality.” U.R. reiterated the idea of “sarvodaya” —or “unto this last”. The challenge of our times, he added, was “to redefine intelligence” to include all kinds of intelligence and not merely that of the cerebral kind. He spoke at length about the importance of the idea of reservations, which was Ambedkar’s idea, which had brought in people from the lowest castes into the mainstream. “Naiveté”, he said, “is the basis of new thought” and cited the examples of Gandhi and Yeats. How would Gandhi, unless he was naïve, have thought that by lifting a handful of salt, the British Empire would fall? “The naiveté of Gandhi defeated all the intelligence of the British.”

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In an interview given to Rajya Sabha TV in the programme, “To The Point”, few months prior to the last elections in Karnataka, he again iterated that “our times are oppressive.”²

U.R. always seemed unafraid to speak his heart out. Between his birth in Melige, Tirthahalli (Shimoga) on 21 December 1932, and his demise on 22 August 2014, Bangalore had turned into Bengaluru (a move he supported) and an entire story of the Indian democracy experiment had been played out, to raise more questions than yield answers. In his loss, India lost one of its most consistent critical voices of the public intellectual. Winner of the Jnanpith award and the Padma Bhushan, this literary mind became the most visibly celebrated face of the ‘navya’ (new) movement in Kannada literature across the world. In 2013, he was nominated for the Man Booker prize. His novel *Bharatipura* was shortlisted for *The Hindu* Literary Prize in 2011.

His elementary education happened in a traditional Sanskrit school in Doorvasapura and in Tirthahalli and Mysore. He did his MA at the University of Mysore and went to England thereafter on a Commonwealth Scholarship. He was awarded a doctorate in 1966 from the University of Birmingham for his dissertation, *Politics and Fiction in the 1930s*. U.R. started his career as a lecturer in the English department of the University of Mysore in 1970. By 1987, he had attained the position of Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. He was also appointed Chairman of the National Book Trust in 1992 and was elected President of the Sahitya Academy in 1993. He was twice appointed the Chairperson of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune³. In between, he was visiting professor to several Indian and foreign universities, including, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Iowa and Tufts University.

His “critical insider-ness” is something many have commented on; being born into a Brahmin family and having lived in a tradition, he was able to bear out his

acute observation with a rare critical reflection. And this critical reflection was seen in his most famous and much commented-upon novel, *Samskara* (1965), which was translated by A.K. Ramanujan as *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* in 1978. It was made into a film in 1970, directed and produced by T. Pattabhirama Reddy (with screenplay by Girish Karnad and Pattabhirama Reddy and cinematography by Australian cameraman Tom Cowan). The film was initially banned for having the potential to create trouble for its pronounced anti-Brahmin stance, but was later released and went on to win the National Award for the Best Feature Film in that year. The film also won the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival in 1972.

U.R. has left behind a large volume of work: short-story collections — *Endendhigu Mugiyada Kathe*, *Mouni* (Silent Man), *Prashne* (The Question), *Clip Joint*, *Ghata Shradda*, *Aakaasha mattu Bekku*, *Suryana Kudure* (The Stallion of the Sun), *Eradu dashakada kategalu*, *Aidu dashakada kategalu*; novels — *Samskara*, *Bharathipura*, *Avasthe*, *Bhava* and *Divya*. He also wrote a play, *Avahane*. And he wrote several essays in literary criticism, as well. His collections of poems are — “15 Padyagalu”, “Mithuna” and “Ajjana Hegala Sukkugalu”. He also wrote a novella *Bara*.

U.R. was deeply involved with the question of Indian languages and the politics of language and in many of his speeches and writings we find him expressing the need to understand the idea of India through the linguistic discourse. In the Fourth Sumitra Chishti Memorial Lecture on ‘Globalisation, English and “Other” Languages’, delivered at the India International Center, New Delhi, on 3 March 2009, U.R. had said:

Every language has a ‘frontyard’ and a ‘backyard’. As an example, I take my own home in my village: a large house, with a *chavri*, a frontyard. We had an inner house, and we had a backyard, which also had a well. My father received his friends in the frontyard. He used to get the paper *Harijan*, and translate it to them, talk about the freedom struggle among other things, and also the *Ramayana*. But in our backyard, women from all castes would come and chat with my mother about various matters. As a child, I listened to all this and perhaps that is why I became a writer. If I had been only in the frontyard, perhaps I would have become a politician⁴. . . Almost all Indian languages have a backyard and also an *ati-shudra*, who now have become literate and they bring their rich experiences. We have much more spoken literature, oral literature, than written literature. And, this is in the ‘backyard’. Our languages have a great future because the ‘backyard’ provides a continuous supply.⁵

Further, he comments:

There are three languages that most people know. I don’t call any of them mother tongue. Mother tongue is a word which can be used only in Europe. I call them, in Kannada: *Mane Mathu*, *Beedi Mathu*, *Attada Mathu*. *Mane Mathu* is the language

of the home... There are many writers and poets who write in Kannada, but speak Tamil at home; Bendre, who wrote in Kannada, spoke at home in Marathi. This is culturally necessary. No *Mane Mathu* is given up in India. *Beedi Mathu* is the language of the province, or the lively speech of the street. Kannada is the *beedi mathu*. *Attada Mathu* is the language of the upstairs or refinement. Ramanujan wrote a poem: When I was hungry I spoke to my mother in Tamil, to get my food. I talked to boys and girls in Kannada when I was mischievous. My father, a professor of mathematics, was upstairs and talked to me in English when he called me’... He would have spoken to Ramanujan in Persian, or at one time, in Samskrutha, or at some point in future, if China happens to be dominant, Chinese will be the international language. And, this has no meaning for me. But we need an *Attada Mathu* to communicate: Sankara needed it, Ramanujan needed it, Gandhi needed it. One must not emotionalise matters by talking only about the mother tongue. In all our territories all these languages survive. If Karnataka has place only for Kannada and not other languages, it becomes a fascist state...⁶

‘I must point out... that in my thinking a cosmopolitan thinker is Euro-centred whereas the community-based thinker is an organic intellectual, and universalist.’⁷

In many of his works, we find a deep reflection on the nature of Time in people’s lives. His *time* was usually one which the *bhasha / desi* (as opposed to *cosmopolitan / margā*) traditions are familiar with; the way time is constructed in terms of the movement of one generation to another in a kind of seamless connect between the two, yet different from each other. Two of his works can be cited to highlight this element. One was a poem called *Wrinkles on Grandpa’s Shoulders* (1989), which I quote below:

The wrinkles on grandpa’s shoulder
Are the contoured hills and valleys seen from above...

My great grandfather’s ride upon his grandpa’s shoulder
Too was similar, in the woods, like mine
Clutching grandpa’s tuft- riding
Elephant back...

It is the same forest seen every day,
The favorite path...

The trodden path of the affable eternity....
These are the memories-
The wrinkles on
My shoulder that wish to carry.

Then there is a story in the collection *Ghatashraddha⁸, Kabhi na Samapt Hone Wali Kahaani* (*The Never-Ending Tale*).

The story itself begins with T.S. Eliot:

“Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past”

“*Wahi kahaani, wahi ek kahaani, wahi, wahi. Meri daadi ne jo mujhe*

*sunaayi thi. Meri tarah mere pote ka beta bhi apni pad-daadi se zid karke kahaani sun raha hai.*⁹

(That same story, the very same one. The one which my grandmother told me. Just like me, my grandson's son too is listening to the story which he adamantly demanded to hear from his great-grandmother.)

The story itself revolves around the almost circular motion of time and hints at the idea (without making any statement) of transmigration of soul (or the body being a mere garment each soul wears), a sentiment echoed in the lines of the Gita in the verses (which the story ends with):

*nainam chindanti shastraani, nainam dahati paavakah
Na cha kledayantyo na cha shoshyati marutah*¹⁰

(The soul can never be cut into pieces by any weapon, nor can he be burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind.)

In U.R. you had a person who observed the world and engaged with it at always close quarters, be it as a critical insider (when it came to writing about the outdated traditions that kept people imprisoned) or a political commentator of the times. In his latter role, he more often than not, fell out with many of his earlier supporters and flirted with controversy more than once. In his personal life, though, he lived by his convictions. Yet, it may occur to people who watched him closely as to why he was given a traditional ritual cremation in the end. The answer could only be that here was a man who lived with his contradictions, but openly so.

Be that as it may, so many years after *Samskara* was penned, we are still haunted by the subject-matter of that famous novel: caste, in news reports such as these (as late as July 2015):

Sometime around the second week of May, 45 Madiga families in Pathapally village of Telangana were driven out of the land that had been allotted to them by the government, by members of the Boya (upper caste) community. This was allegedly a reaction to an earlier incident, where Raghuram, a Dalit, had tried to access the village temple. After driving the Dalit families out, "*members of the Boya community then proceeded to bury their dead in this land to ensure that the displaced families cannot return,*" The Hindu reported. The report also says that the Revenue Divisional Officer and the DSP pulled down the huts and a shop owned by Dalits, alleging that they are encroachment, although they have documents to prove otherwise. They have also been denied water from a reservoir.¹¹

In the same case, there was also a call for a shutdown of the temple by the brahmin priest and to open it only after a 'purification ritual'. Moreover, the upper caste people implemented a social boycott of the Madigas and also tried to stop sale of groceries, etc to the Madigas.

So, the agrahara, Durvasa, of U.R.'s novel seems to live on in eerie replicas, though there are more of the complexities of caste-class and the politics of land and a kind of identity crisis forced upon rural India thanks to the economic model currently adopted, as 'add-ons' to this ancient tale. And there is no radical 'un-brahmin' Naranappa at the centre of this tale. At this point, let me revert to U.R.'s address to students and faculty at IIM-B, where he ended his speech with a poem, *London*, by William Blake, who was also, according to him 'naïve' enough to have composed the poem in 1794, at the height of the Industrial Revolution in England:

I wandered through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening church appals,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace-walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.

Ananthamurthy remarked, at the end of the poem, that we need to ask the kind of question of 'development' today that Blake had asked of industrialised England of his time. "Does Indian development now harm people? Yes! Tribal people lose their homes, land and ways of living..." with this development, he said.

Finally, A.K. Ramanujan, in his Afterword to the translated *Samskara* wrote:

One could reasonably take the view that this novel, written in the sixties, is really presenting a decadent Hinduism through the career of a limited hero, capable only of arcs, not full circles. As said earlier, the last phase of the Acharya's initiation is an anxious return, a waiting on the threshold; his questions seem to find no restful answers. What is suggested is a movement, not a closure. The novel ends, but does not conclude.¹²

Similarly, the physical raiment of U.R. Ananthamurthy has dissolved. The writings have ended; but the questions raised by his pen – in *Samskara* and thereafter – do not end.

Notes

1. The whole speech is posted on the IIM-B official website.
2. Rajya Sabha TV. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=an0yx21NQu4
3. Currently site of a political struggle on behalf of the students and former alumni of the institution.
4. U.R. did try to enter politics. He made an attempt to run for the Lok Sabha elections, stating, simply, that his "prime ideological objective in opting to contest the elections was to fight the BJP." The Janata Dal (Secular) leader and former Prime Minister of India, H.D. Deve Gowda had made an offer for Murthy to contest for his party. But when the JD (Secular) sought power-sharing with BJP, Murthy is reported to have remarked, "I will never forgive my friends in the Janata Dal (Secular) for joining hands with the BJP." He also contested for the Rajya Sabha elections in 2006.
5. Adapted and Abridged in 'Words and the World', *IIC Quarterly*, vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer 2009)
6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
8. I refer to a Hindi translation of the same. B.R. Narayana, *Ghatashraddha (Stories)*, Radhakrishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 2008.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
11. Abhishek Jha, 'How Land Continues To Be A Tool For Dalit Oppression: The Case Of Pathapally', <http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2015/07/land-rights-for-dalits/>
12. U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*, Translated by A.K. Ramanujan, OUP, 1978, pp. 146-7

Channeling Cultures – Television Studies from India

Edited by Biswarup Sen and Abhijit Roy, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 322, Rs 895,
ISBN: 9780198092056

Pamela Philipose*

Seminars do not always engender significant books. Let me re-phrase it. Seminars do not always engender significant books unless their proceedings are made to yield their insights through a process of reviewing and updating. On that count, *Channeling Cultures Television Studies from India*, which traces its origins to an international seminar organised at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in 2009, is an outstanding example of what good editors can achieve. The topic of the initial discussion was focused on the first half century of Indian television, however the editors – Biswarup Sen and Abhijit Roy – have been able to extend the discussion considerably and not just in temporal terms.

The editors express the hope that this book, comprising 12 major commentaries from some of the best known academics and authors working on the media, will stimulate a rethinking of the role of television in the country's cultural politics. While it is true that significant later day developments, like the media-driven election campaign that saw Narendra Modi come to power in the summer of 2014, fall outside its timeframe, *Channeling Cultures* does go some way towards building an indigenous theoretical framework to study television. Central to the objective of theorising anew is the editors' view that television has had a major role in shaping many historical processes in post-liberalisation India, from assertions of citizenship and urbanity to defining family politics and sexuality. New York University Professor Arvind Rajagopal, in the Afterword to this volume, provides an explanation of why this is the case. Television, as he puts it, "is clearly an important avenue through which new modes of exercising power are being practiced". He goes as far as to suggest that television gets invested with an almost state-like authority with what is viewed on it, perceived to constitute authoritative knowledge.

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A major trope in this book is the evolution of this institution from being the state-run Doordarshan/Prasar Bharati to a multi-channelled entity shaped by the forces of economic liberalisation and globalisation. In its earlier avatar, television – according to Sanjay Asthana in his chapter 'Television, Narrative Identity and Social Imaginaries' – mimicked colonial broadcasting's centralised control over audiences. Abhijit Roy theorises this transition in a chapter entitled, 'TV after Television Studies', by adopting Raymond Williams' concept of 'flow'. In its earlier avatar, Doordarshan put out a realist fare tailored to state agendas of development. This gave way to the 'flow' of consumerist spectacles – soaps, pop music fare and reality shows – that came to mark television programming in the post-liberalisation age. The flow form then, according to Roy, is the inevitable signifier of the global flow of capital.

The transition was by no mean painless for the politicians of the day. Nalin Mehta, in 'When Live News Was Too Dangerous', reveals how even someone like Narasimha Rao, the man who as Prime Minister had ushered in economic liberalisation, was extremely chary about giving up political control over television. What did contribute to the eventual dismantling of the old order, Mehta writes, was an aspiring middle class which was clearly restive under a restrictive and frugal Nehruvian state and, of course, the possibility of handsome investment opportunities that came with globalisation.

But did anything really change for audiences? The writers in this volume differ in their assessments. Dipankar Sinha, in 'From Clients to Consumers', doesn't think much has changed and argues that both regimes did not allow audiences to develop their critical faculties or recognise sufficiently the importance of citizenship. Even the talk shows and phone-ins introduced later, hardly helped to deepen the capacity of viewers to exercise their own judgment.

Other writers note the decisive transformations that television underwent after liberalisation. In 'Television

News and an Indian Infotainment Sphere', Daya Kishan Thussu dwells on the commodification of news and the moot question he raises is whether such 'infotainment' debases political discourse or democratizes it. In answering this question, he quotes Robert W. McChesney's observation that the media system "is not only closely linked to the ideological dictates of the business run society, it is also an integral element of the economy". This has its own logic, even leading to the "narrative of the real" coming to resemble popular cinema, as Nilanjana Gupta concludes after her review of Bangla news channels in the chapter 'Sange Thakun'.

While television analyses generally revolve around the visual, Purnima Mankekar in 'Televisual Temporalities and the Affective Organization of Everyday Life' sets out to explore its affects. She unpacks the hegemonic impacts of the "liveness" of television with reference to coverage of events like the Twin Tower attacks of September 11, 2001 or the Mumbai attacks of November 26, 2008, both of which were televisual representations that were affectively charged. Such projections, as John Hutnyk reminds us in 'NDTV24X7 Remix: Mohammad Afzal Guru Frame by Frame', present some real dangers. Hutnyk – who is currently developing a critique of 'terrorism' as portrayed on television – suggests the possibility of serious miscarriages of justice when "the justice process is played out through the televisual public sphere". In the Mohammad Afzal Guru case, he uncovers how reality got transformed into reality television and issues of crucial concern reduced to the sum of their ratings.

Reality television representation is, in fact, where Biswarup Sen locates the globalised aesthetic. In his chapter, 'Big Brother, Bigg Boss Reality Television as Global Form', he attributes the great popularity the genre enjoys across the world to the capacity of the format to achieve space-time compression and travel easily across geographies and cultures. He sees reality TV then as "a sort of universal machine that engineers global effect through the mechanism of formal implementation".

Sen's privileging of reality television, however, begs the question whether the television serial cannot also be seen as a "universal machine". Could it not be argued that *Dallas* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* were also fungible templates for television serials across the world with local characteristics. In Tamil Nadu, to take one example, production houses produced, cookie cutter style, all manner of television programmes from tear jerkers to talk shows, as Uma Vangal points out in the chapter, 'Tears, Talk and Play'.

Such fare also came with distinct politico-cultural resonances. Santanu Chakrabarti, in 'The Saffron Hues of Gender and Agency on Indian Television', dwells at some length on the affluent, upper caste and conservative universe of the famous K-serials – *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*; *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* and *Kasautii Zingagii Kayy* – which cast all women as domestic goddesses, albeit sometimes warring ones, and conflated an Indian identity with a Hindu one. Although he avoids attributing any direct causality between the popularity of these serials and the rise of political Hindutva, he is struck by the commonality of their social imaginary.

Several shibboleths have been interrogated in this volume. Shanti Kumar, in 'Spaces of Television', believes, for instance, there is a need to get away the public television-private television binary in order to better understand the hybrid character of the media culture in India today, although he is careful to state that he is not attempting to debunk left wing theories of ideology critique. In many ways, the contending ideological frameworks of the various contributors to this volume are never really resolved and lend it a piquant dissonance at times. The lack of a singular framework and a homogenous consensus can be a weakness in books that emerge from seminars. It can, at the same time, be a strength because raising questions and critiquing familiar positions are, as Peter Ronald deSouza states in his Foreword to this volume, crucial to a democracy. It is also a good way to better understand an institution as pivotal to Indian democracy as television.

From Hagiographies to Biographies: Ramanuja in Tradition and History

Ranjeeta Dutta

New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 248, Rs. 895/-, ISBN: 9780198092292.

Shobhna Sinha*

Many histories of the medieval Bhakti movement rely upon hagiographies for substantiation. Hagiographical literature is also embedded in a historical context and, thus, can provide valuable information on several themes — the use of the *varta* literature to study the Vallabhite tradition being a case in point. Ranjeeta Dutta's project, however, is different and therein lies its immense importance. *From Hagiographies to Biographies* is a remarkable addition to the existing scholarship on medieval devotionism, as it casts a critical eye on the nature of the hagiographical intervention itself. In the process, we are also treated to a masterful study of the dynamics of sect formation (Srivaisnavas) between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries in South India. The key figure is that of Ramanuja (1017-1137), whose ideas form the basis of the Visistadvaita school of thought.

The political context to the development of the Srivaisnav *sampraday*, marked by the rule of the Cholas and the subsequent rise of regional kingdoms such as the Hoysalas and the Kakatiyas, and the emergence of the Vijayanagar empire is discussed in detail (Chapters 3 and 4). Dutta explains that with the gradual decline in the power of the *brahmadeyas*, the *mathas* developed as important players in the temple economy of the times. According to the hagiographies, Ramanuja himself was the head of the *matha* at Srirangam. In this changed environment, many non-brahman groups also became powerful. For example, communities such as the *kaikkolas* (weavers) came to be increasingly associated with temple administration. The hagiographies credit Ramanuja for starting this practice (although as Dutta points out there is no epigraphical evidence to support such claims).

Indeed, one of Dutta's primary aims in the book is to investigate the modern perception of Ramanuja as a social reformer by examining the varied representations

in the earliest hagiographies, which however have been ignored "and a fixed image of Ramanuja as a social reformer has been presented" (16). In the chapter, titled "Devotion and Dissent", the author demonstrates how even as the social base of the sect was being expanded, nevertheless the *varnasramadharm* framework was never abandoned. Moreover, the caste question was not the central question for either Ramanuja (as expressed in the commentaries he wrote) or for the hagiographers. In fact, the Smarta *brahmana* ancestry of Ramanuja is regularly drawn attention to (79). However, considering the varying notions of social reform that historians often employ, one would have liked Dutta to have included a more detailed discussion of what social reform could mean in medieval South India (even if that is not the main subject of the book).

The corollary to such essentialisation also is that often the vibrancy and the heterogeneity of religious traditions itself gets lost. In other words, along with the personality of Ramanuja, the different voices that existed at the time of the formation of the sect, reflecting the complexity of the entire process are also lost. One example of such reductionism can also be seen in the portrayal of Ramanuja's ideas of Visistadvaita as theological and less intellectual than Sankara and his Advaita, which is seen as more of a philosophical enterprise. Dutta effectively demonstrates the intellectual aspect of Visistadvaita, thereby rectifying this erroneous characterisation.

Within the Srivaisnav sect, Ramanuja had to encounter several levels of opposition, including attempts to poison him. Moreover, the evolving interpretation of his ideas (for example on the nature of *prapatti*) led to the formation of two sub-sects — the Vatakalai and the Tenkalai. Although the division had not taken place during the centuries under study, yet the different trajectories were becoming evident. The composers of the hagiographies, members of the Srivaisnav community, were also influenced

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by their respective affiliations (30-31). Moreover, the hagiographers themselves were selecting from an already existing (oral) corpus of stories. Thus, even as we accept the validity of hagiographies as a historical source, they cannot be used so uncritically. Dutta believes that due to the treatment of hagiographies as primarily religious texts (and therefore “non-rational”), there has been a “failure to treat hagiographies as literary texts” (213).

The author argues that the overriding purpose of hagiographers was to present Ramanuja as the ideal *acarya* — that is, knowledgeable as well as ever compassionate. Within the figure of Ramanuja, the concept of *Ubhaya Vedanta* (the coming together of the Sanskrit and the Tamil Alvar tradition) was sought to be realised. The composition of the hagiographies in Manipravalam instead of Sanskrit was also reflective of the same effort. While the Saivites had been successful at reorienting their theology to make it more inclusive, the ideology of *Ubhaya Vedanta* reflected the Srivaisnava attempts to do so. Indeed, the Saivites were not the only competitors (for patronage, devotees). The Jains, the Buddhists and the Advaitins were equally part of the devotional landscape. As she points out, this inter-sectarian competition forms a major part of the

hagiographies. The use of both epigraphical and textual evidence allows Dutta to map out the varied arenas in which this competition occurred. Other attempts to create the Srivaisnav community included the institution of new festivals in which the Alvar hymns would be sung, the establishment of pilgrimages and the elaboration of ritual.

Dutta writes eloquently and cogently across the six chapters into which the book is divided. Moreover, before launching in to any discussion, she provides the reader with a brief summary of what to expect in the coming pages. At the end, there is a short summing up. Such devices make reading easy and Dutta is able to do it in a way that does not take away from the overall elegance of the prose. However, the proof reading leaves much to be desired.

The last chapter raises several important questions and one will wait for answers in her future undertakings. Also, the similarities (as well as differences) with the hagiographical enterprise in the context of the Vaishnavite sects active in North India (especially Vrindavan) are fascinating. Perhaps Dutta could apply her considerable knowledge to such an endeavour as well.

Thuggee, Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India

Kim A. Wagner

Delhi, Primus Books, 2014, pp. xxvi + 269, Rs. 995, ISBN: 978-93-80607-76-4

Sukumar Muralidharan

IIAS, Shimla

Within long dominant historiographic traditions, the twilight years of the Mughal empire, when the British East India Company was buying up revenue rights from one penurious satrap after another, the times met the Hobbesian definition of “war of all against all”. With life being “nasty, brutish and short”, the advent of company *raj* was a little less than providential. In accord with the Hobbesian principle, “propriety” or the right to property in this new order, as in all “commonwealths”, vested with the sovereign power, though this aspect has not really been adequately explored.

As Kim Wagner puts it in the preface to his book, first published in 2007 and now available in an Indian edition: “India in the nineteenth century was no place for a weakling... Hot dusty winds rattled the palm leaves, mosquitoes buzzed, malaria, cholera, dysentery and smallpox struck down nearly half the debilitated white residents before their time”. To this, may be added the constant threat of famine, admittedly not a scourge that Wagner pays serious heed to, since perhaps the White residents of India were never severely exposed to it. As a Commission reporting in 1901 noted, there had been no fewer than twelve famines between 1765 and 1858, not to mention four visitations of what were classified as “severe scarcities”.

An excavation of history from available records and artefacts would necessarily be refracted through multiple prisms, among which, contemporary concerns are perhaps key. The records themselves reflect the temper of the times in which they were created and the social and political processes they served. And then there is another manner of refractory prism far more befuddling: how did the subjects of the documents perceive their relationship with the recording process? In a context of transition, when legal regimes were themselves in flux and indeed ill understood, could a subject testifying before an officer

of the law be seen as rendering evidence in a manner that is intelligible by contemporary standards? The task of unfurling that mystery is rendered especially complex by the fact that the subjects had no voice of their own, no methods of placing an imprint in the rapid flux of time. They were often the orphans of history.

The study of *thuggee*, understood as a form of highway robbery accompanied by a macabre ritual of murder, has followed two main templates. In colonial construction, it was about the calming hand of the British East India Company restoring order in a society being led inexorably towards chaos by the ugly recrudescence of practices such as *thuggee* and *sati*. When nationalist forces, as they were called later, recovered their voice after the disorientation of the colonial conquest, a different construction emerged. As Hiralal Gupta puts it in a 1959 work, “*thuggee* actually emerged as the result of the chaos and instability caused by the expansion of the Company’s rule”. In a later work, Stewart Gordon puts it altogether more formally: “We cannot and will not know the nature of the ‘thugs’ or any other marauding group of the eighteenth century until we return them to a historical and geographic setting, and view them in the context of the ongoing structure and process of power”.

Wagner’s work on *thuggee* begins with the premise that all records inherited from the past are unreliable as testaments of what the phenomenon was really about. Eric Hobsbawm, a pioneer of modern historical methods, brings into focus “an alternative history of banditry, which emphasised the differences between official and local perceptions regarding the legitimacy and status of outlaws”.

Much of the understanding of *thuggee* emanated from *Ramaseeana*, a work by the colonial administrator, W.H. Sleeman, published in 1836, when in official perception the menace was believed mostly extirpated. This is where

thuggee acquired a firm anchorage in traditional religious beliefs and practices, as an inheritance of the benighted past that was the British mission to liberate India from. Wagner suggests that this may have been a self-serving construction to invest Sleeman's efforts with a greater than deserved gravity.

In tracing historical roots, Wagner finds references to *thuggee* in the late mediaeval period, including in the work of poet-saint Surdas who lived and wrote in the sixteenth century. His conclusion is that the word "*thug*" did in its "indigenous use ... fully correspond with the later British use of that term; that is, as meaning a robber, who deceived, murdered and plundered travellers on the road". Whatever the antiquity of the phenomenon, following the 1770 famine, there was a perceptible uptick in its prevalence, though concurrent descriptions are seen by Wagner to be using the term "dacoity".

This was a time of transition when East India Company possessions in India were being consolidated under a new class of intermediaries: *zamindars* vested with the right to gather revenue from the tiller. Areas that suffered from an upsurge in violent crime though, abutted on lands under the sovereign control of other powers, such as the Marathas and the Nawab Vazir of Awadh. The company's initial response was to enforce a legal writ through the new class of intermediaries, often seeking to hold them liable for failure to put down crime. These administrative moves culminated in the Regulation IX of 1808 and Regulation VI of 1810, both of which took aim at violent crime with its ritualised forms of murder. These changes in law created an administrative category that was seamlessly transformed into a social construct. *Thuggee* became from then on, a marker of primordial group identity.

Utilising newly vested powers, company officials pursued their campaign with vigour, but serious reservations soon began to emerge on the fairness of targeting particular individuals on grounds of identity. Many of the harsh enforcement measures chosen by the company were, moreover, spurned by the *zamindars* and landlords who found little incentive in following a course of action that undermined their own social standing and authority. In these times, the company's administrative philosophy was premised upon winning the consent of the colonised people by incorporating supposed elements of local traditions. The Nizamat Adalat, which was effectively a court of appeals set up in Calcutta to review decisions of district judiciaries, did not look kindly upon the exertions of the company officials of the time.

This led to the replacement of the top company official in the area of concern. N.J. Halhed was appointed to a magistrate's position, replacing the official who had caused serious outrage with his identity-based attacks

on crime. Wagner does not elaborate on Halhed's antecedents and this is a disappointment for a surname that is justly famous from the early years of the company *raj* in India. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed was an intimate of Warren Hastings, with considerable responsibility for establishing the early template of British rule beginning with an understanding that respect for native traditions was essential to obtaining the consent of the governed. This philosophy inspired the construction of a vision of Indian society that froze in place certain principles: that European Christian and Hindu civilisations shared a common origin and that caste was the basic building block of the Indian social matrix.

Whatever his relationship with Warren Hastings' confidant, N.J. Halhed was assigned to his post in the *thuggee* heartland with explicit instructions that he was not to proceed against any person on "any general suspicion or imputation of bad character". The kinder, gentler overtures to the local intermediaries though, did not fetch any better rewards than his predecessor's rough and ready approach. Halhed recorded, indeed, that more than the rewards that the *zamindars* obtained for their service to the company, "their chief revenue is realised from a participation in the spoils of a set of robbers in their pay and protected by them".

His parleys with the *zamindars* proving unfruitful, Halhed embarked on a more heavy-handed approach to disarm the entire area where the *thugs* were believed to have their operational bases. It was, needless to say, a course of action guaranteed to raise hackles among the company's intermediaries and engender stiff resistance among the populace. In this environment of mutual hostility and suspicion, a detachment of the company's army, proceeding from Agra to Etawah on an inspection visit, was set upon by armed gangs in the vicinity of the town of Sindouse, already famous then as the epicentre of the *thugs*. This has been in all subsequent constructions, a key episode in the campaign against *thuggee*. For all the tens of thousands of natives killed, Lieutenant Maunsell, who led that small army expedition, remains the only White man to have fallen to the *thugs*.

Little though was to change and "no new measures were introduced to secure the conviction of suspected thugs". A hegemonic discourse on *thuggee* also seemed far from the administrative priorities of the company, as the Maratha wars intervened. Though statistics cannot be relied upon in the absence of an agreed definition of the phenomenon, violent crime as registered by the company administrators, also seemed to be on the decline through the 1810s. With the intrusion of the evangelical element in the 1820s and the extension of the company's territorial authority, a new construction began to dominate the official discourse. The dissolute and barbaric religious

influence over *thuggee* was emphasised, uniting under a common rubric, differently motivated crimes widely dispersed in space. And a common approach, unmindful of the subtleties of fair legal procedure, was sanctioned, which emphasised the supposed deterrent effect of capital punishment. At the head of the campaign was W.H. Sleeman, a captain in the company army, who found in it a vehicle to further his career ambitions. His subsequent turn to literary expression in *Ramaseena*, then came to be accepted as the authoritative text on *thuggee*.

Wagner successfully establishes that far from being the kind of mystical cult it was made out to be, *thuggee* was part of the process of state formation in colonial India. The various avatars in which it was painted, were integrally connected to different stages in the articulation of the colonial state apparatus and its effort to consolidate a territorial spread through cooptation of credible intermediaries in adequate numbers.

Finally, the effort to provide an alternative narrative by tapping into the voices of the real people engaged in *thuggee* has to depend on their narratives as embedded in colonial records. At the end of the book, the methodology remains incompletely justified, but with the plurality of sources that he taps, Wagner succeeds in a reconstruction that is more subtle and persuasive than anything prior to it. Far from being a cult that was self-nurturing in material and ideological terms, the *thugs* were perhaps best viewed as social bandits in Hobsbawm's sense. They would not have been half as persistent a phenomenon without some manner of nourishment within the larger social matrix. And their extirpation, if it really was that, was equally about a decline in an absolute sense, as about a change in nomenclature. *Thuggee* was decreed to have ended, because official records stopped classifying a certain category of incidents in that fashion.

Arya and Other Stories

Chandrika Balan

New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2014, pp.144, Rs. 425/-, ISBN: 978-81-250-5680-5

Nisha Tiwari

Appended with an insightful introduction by K. Satchidanandan, Chandrika Balan's *Arya and Other Stories* offers a rich conglomeration of Indian women (from Kerala) negotiating their deepest desires in a social space that straddles between conventional values and the demands of modern times. Written originally in Malayalam, Balan's self-translated collection steers through ancestral village homes to small towns and large cities with equal ease, portraying and calibrating the dimensions of the conflict of 'feminine' and 'feminist' impulses that war within and without the characters of her stories. These stories navigate through the dichotomy of *tharavad* (aristocrats' house) and *chanta* (the rural market or bazaar) to question the 'moral' values that are imposed upon, and therefore define the women in private and public spaces.

In his Introduction, Satchidanandan situates Balan's stories within the long tradition of the feminist movement and women's writing in Kerala. He foregrounds that Balan's stories demonstrate an instinctual penchant for exploring the "essential femininity" and "sisterhood with nature" that Satchidanandan sees in Kamala Das's stories. Balan, for him, also "inherits Saraswati Amma's humour, irony and anger at men's hypocrisy (17).

Navigating between the rural and urban landscapes of Kerala, Balan's characters are enmeshed in traditional and modern roles that are imposed upon them by their social spaces and conventions. Balan uses the images of nature (rain, forests, wind, et al.) as a powerful touchstone to convey the suppressed desires of her female protagonists, at times also of the feminine cosmos. For instance, the Devi of the first story, titled "Devigrammam" (A Devi's Village), reveals the mysterious and awfully divine connection that the benign village granny possesses. The

female protagonist connects this fecundity of natural/divine forces, so do her children, whose innocence makes them trust the pagan village goddess. They feel alienated from the logical skepticism of the protagonist's city bred husband. This theme of women's alienation from the excessively materialistic patriarchal world that they are forced to inhabit is a recurring feature in Balan's stories be it in "The Fifth One", "The People's Court", or "The Relevance of Graham Greene in the Life of a Bride", among other stories.

At the same time, the stories adopt powerful mythological analogies that enrich the cultural registers of the narrative. These analogies, at times, serve to reiterate the power of the female protagonist like Mable Simon's ("The People's Court") nom de plume Salome for her powerfully seductive feminist writings, which bear strong resonances with the "Biblical temptress who got John the Baptist beheaded" (57). On the other hand, in some cases, they highlight the ironic distance that the protagonists have from their powerful referents. For instance, Savitri, in "The Fifth One", would rather take her life than continue living with her husband, Satyam, in a loveless marriage—a stark contrast to the Savitri of Hindu mythology who fought with Yama, the God of Death, to revive her husband.

The stories flesh out women's innermost desires, anxieties and expectations that remain largely hidden from other characters — husbands, brothers, children — around them. The secret world of the protagonists adds layers to the sketches of their characters, thereby making them rich subjects of interest. There is such depth to Balan's layered exposition of their inner conflicts that these remain unarticulated in the external world even till the end. The alienation of these women from their immediate social surroundings is due to their sheer helplessness at the inexpressibility of their innermost

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feelings. Be it the orphaned Arya of "Arya" or the recently widowed old woman Subhadra in "A Companion for the Twilight Hour", the cheated wife in "The (Postmodern) Story of Jyoti Viswanath"; all are left helpless in the face of conventions of passive and muted womanhood imposed upon them by the social order.

Balan's artistic prowess lies in her wry humour, which at its best assumes an ironic or sarcastic tenor. More often than not, this helps in diffusing the sheer despondency of her characters' situation. Balan's insightful and economical wit successfully pulls the reader out of the irresolute conflict between personal desires and social realities. At the same time, Balan allows the unkind realities of her women's dilemmas to linger faintly in the minds of her readers. She shocks us along with her character, Smitha, with the revelation that her internet friend/love interest, while handsome and a top-notch engineer (read eligible bachelor) is on a wheelchair. Or, with the bride's horror at knowing that the love of her life, Praveen, used her and is willing to still use her sexually; her only choice being to return to her husband to be raped every night. The satirical twists, jarring her protagonists' lives, leave a deep imprint on the readers' minds.

Nevertheless, Balan's women are not always passive or betrayed. The writer paints her female characters with fine strokes, combining wit and depth that reveal their active negotiations with their situations. In "The Story of a Poem", Sushma's hidden desires for her unrequited premarital love, of which her chauvinist leering husband Reguraman remains unaware, find voice in a poem. Her everyday chore of writing a poem and tearing it (before her husband returns home from work) can be construed as a cyclical pattern of Sushma's subversion of the imposed role of a passive wife. On the other hand, certain stories expose the sheer gullibility of women like Indu Kumari, whose ambition to appear on reality television

leads her to naively encourage and participate in her own abduction in "Sponsors Please". Such caustic humour makes the reader experience shock, dismay and sarcasm in such quick succession that it is simply impossible to reduce these stories to a single moral or message.

While the female protagonists are neatly carved with great attention to detail, the same cannot be said of the men in her stories, who appear more or less as disappointing figures. All the husbands in her stories are caricatured as chauvinists, sexually violent or promiscuous, or more. However, barring their acts of betrayal of their wives' expectations or faith, one does not get further insights into their situation. In other words, they may be perceived as catalysts that allow Balan to solely narrate the story of her female protagonists.

In addition, stories like "Bonsai" and "The (Postmodern) Story of Jyoti Vishwanath" seem inclined towards far-fetched moral implications. Consequently, they adversely affect her feminist stance. In the former, the outgoing feminist, Champaka Menon's hobby of bonsai cultivation is probably the reason why her grandson is a dwarf. Similarly, Jyoti's long hours of work are the probable reason for her husband's straying into a liaison with the domestic help. While this can be taken in a sarcastic tenor, it is Jyoti's silent acceptance of her state, despite being financially capable that underlines the moral implications. It is this aspect that to some extent mitigates the punch of this collection in the ambit of gender discourse.

Nevertheless, Chandrika Balan's *Arya and Other Stories* is a rewarding read due to its fine interweaving of *tharavad* and *chanta* to offer a synoptic glimpse into the moorings of women caught in the middle of frozen conventions of femininity and their urgent inner desires and expectations of being a woman.

Interrogating Politics & Society: Twentieth-Century Indian Subcontinent

Suranjan Das

Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. xvi + 212, Rs. 950/-, ISBN: 978-93-80607-77-1.

Dr. Anindita Mukhopadhyay*

Suranjan Das's *Interrogating Politics & Society: Twentieth – Century Indian Subcontinent* is a timely compendium of a range of essays exploring three themes that are of immense relevance to contemporary India, and indeed, to South Asia as well: communalism, nationalism and the criminal underworld, a labyrinthine of zones declared illegal and criminal by both the colonial State and respectable indigenous communities. The eleven essays in the volume were published at various stages of a long, committed and discerning intellectual engagement, tracing the pressing problems of the formation of community identities that had entered the political domain during the colonial period.

Certain characteristic features and demarcating specificities of all regions are produced through historical processes and unique socio-political, economic, and other interrelated cultural dynamics. In this collection of essays, Suranjan Das chooses a region that he understands thoroughly – Bengal.

In the first two essays, Das focusses on the manner in which propaganda works at four levels. He takes the reader through the long period, from 1905 to 1947, and carefully lays out the modes in which political passions that legitimised communal ideologies and helped to stake out the political positions of the two warring communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, were whipped up. The third essay connects the running leitmotif of growing communalisation of politics and increasing polarisation between the two major communities to the Calcutta riots that flared up in 1992. Here, he traces the historical trajectories that had been present in the political environment of Bengal since pre-Independence days –

and demonstrates that the past shapes the problematic legacies of the present.

Slightly shifting his line of vision, Das then focuses on the discipline of history, that was garnered in the service of building nationalistic narratives of both India and Pakistan, a pernicious trend which lays “claims” to “truth” through authentic historical “facts”. This, he argues, ensures that the deep fault-lines created during the Partition continue to haunt the Indian (and certainly the Bengali) mindscapes.

The next four essays explore the close links between nationalistic identities, which struggled with regionalisms, and the forging of a broad-based nationalistic platform that tried to include regional variations, leading to political agitations out of which the Indian nation-state emerged in 1947. The political struggle finally did achieve Independence from British Imperialism, but at the cost of enormous loss of human lives, as the territorial bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent created the two nations of Pakistan (West and East) and India. Reading between the lines, Das feels that there was a deeper national tragedy, as there was an ever-deepening line of distrust between the two communities, within the hidden spaces of the collective minds of the communities, fostered through a kind of pig-headed historiography, just like there was a visible fencing between territories separating the two nations.

The last two essays explore the growing “criminalisation” of political protests, which the colonial state contained with its harsh use of law-and-order apparatus. These two essays, however, just stop at the colonial state's response to criminality – both to middle-class political action, and also aimed at the separate domain of ‘illegal’ pursuits by the underprivileged. One might have expected a little more cogitation and reflection

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on the process of “criminalisation” by the State, and no less by the civil-society, in post-independence Bengal.

In the book on the whole, Das zeroes in on “communalism”, an emotionally-charged, angst-ridden hate, directed at the cultural and political ‘Other’. Das, with a wealth of historical detail, demonstrates that communalism inevitably rode piggy-back on the equally emotionally-charged discourse of “nationalism”. In fact, Das successfully shows that it was this copula that produced communalism’s lethal punch. Further, such communal discourses were also very often read by antagonistic communities — the Hindus and the Muslims — as nationalism. Despite this shadowy equation between communalism and nationalism, Suranjan Das draws in the reader to share his cautious hope that in Bengal, at least, there is some room for optimism: “We in West Bengal have been fortunately relatively free of communal violence ... Yet it would be wrong to deny the existence of communal tensions in Bengal” (p. 15).

Thus, while not downplaying pan-Islamic tendencies, the growing popularity of the VHP in the face of infiltrations from Bangladesh, and also acknowledging

that communalism, as a phenomenon, is like a rogue-virus that is difficult to contain, and impossible to eradicate, for it spawns ever-new forms of insecurities on which to feed, Das maintains that in Bengal communal tensions do not inevitably lurch toward blood-baths.

The reader feels a slight sense of disorientation, as the book first explores the theme of “communalisation” of identity politics during the colonial rule (deliberately encouraged by British policies), moves to the 1990s, and then suddenly wheels back to the early years of the Congress, and begins the reconnaissance of the ‘Rise and Growth’ of nationalism in India.

Apart from these small discomforts, the fact that these essays, previously flung across various journals and publications, have been brought together in one volume is indeed an academic gain. The volume will be a welcome addition to studies on communalism, its close links to nationalism, and also on a submerged terrain of “criminalisation” by the State. The first and the last themes, indeed, are crucial as they produce the lenses with which to study the contemporary developments in post-colonial India.

Beyond the Private World: Indian Women in the Public Sphere

Ed. by Subrata Bagchi

New Delhi: Primus Books, 2014, pp. x + 370, Rs. 1,395/-, ISBN: 978-93-84082-02-4.

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This volume makes a meaningful attempt to expand the discussion on gender and public sphere beyond their conventional, discursive landscapes within Indian academia, that is, as largely confined to modernity. The thirteen essays in the volume — apart from the introduction and the conclusion — are thematically organised under four different sections: Religion and Women in Pre-Modern India, Women in Modern India, Indian Women and the Means of Empowerment and Change, and Indian Women Break with the Tradition. The book belongs to the genre of theorising women's presence in the public sphere in India with a major inflection proposed and introduced at the conceptual level. The book is also an attempt to bridge the gap, especially in gender studies and other related fields, in addressing "the growing presence of women and hurdles in public sphere in India" (ix).

It opens with a rigorous but slightly laboured editorial engagement with the major themes of the volume, namely, the public sphere, women and conceptual overview. The chapters that follow, cover a range of issues spread across ancient and pre-modern times — such as 'Conceptualising Women, Public Sphere and Hinduism in Ancient India' by Anita Bagchi and 'Situation Ethics and Muslim Women in Medieval India' by Farhat Nasreen — to contemporary issues — such as 'Impediments to Economic Freedom: Women's Livelihood and Work Participation Trends in India' by Sanchari Roy Mukherjee and 'Confronting Patriarchy: Women, Sport and the Public Sphere in Postcolonial India' by Suparna Ghosh Bhattacharya and Kaushik Bandyopadhyay.

The vastitude of the volume and the theoretical terrain that it attempts to trudge is one major feature that will attract the reader. And while it might initially seem discouraging that most, if not all, of the contributors of

the volume belong to the favourite land of academics in India – Bengal; nonetheless, the content of the book moves beyond the peripheries of any single region, constituting conceptions of a broader public sphere and discourses therein.

The larger project of the volume spills outside usual temporal and spatial limits. All the contributors, in one way or another, declare the conceptual inadequacy of the Habermasian public sphere in order to conceptualise the public sphere in India. Instead, essays draw upon and address multiple public spheres where gender discourses, as regular events, address specific sets of issues and concerns. Women's presence in the public sphere could be renegotiated by expanding the limits of the public sphere to include several other elements that are instrumental in mediating those concerns, and not just coffee houses and postcolonial spaces of print. Everything outside the private domain — a vicinity that is very closely attached with women's existence in both traditional and modern Indian societies — become spaces to be reinvented and/or revisited.

This outside-ness does not immediately cater to a standard imagination of public sphere. Nevertheless, such presences, both individually and collectively, are indeed meaningful and a part and parcel of given public spheres. This is one fascinating theme that emerges from the book and is succinctly put forth in the introduction itself. Rather than restricting the analysis to public contestations within different regionalities, the ground of the whole analysis is shifted further to the serious problematic of access to public spheres on the lines of caste, gender and religion (116). However fascinating, such endeavours have yet to travel some distance before attaining clarity. For example, a conceptual vagueness regarding multiple public spheres and multiple layers

of a singular, mainstream public sphere, still looms over several essays of the volume.

The discussions on Muslim (147-168) and Dalit women (168-183) in India in the section on Women in Modern India are two instances where the question of public sphere is invoked in the context of movement towards citizenship rights. However, an engagement with questions at a conceptual level could have benefitted these essays instead of making them look like abrupt presences inside the volume. This is so, even while they, as most other chapters, are definitely good reads in their individual capacities.

While commenting upon some of the major intellectual discourses on development, Adebayo Olukoshi has argued how the production of theories and narratives happen in the North [West], with the South [East] being confined to textboxes. The intellectuals from the East are stamped into addressing their region. The critique from the East or from the rest of the West reaches nowhere. The current volume undertakes a theorisation of public sphere as a serious enterprise by transplanting the same outside bourgeoisie locations. The idea is to not to miss the opportunity to analyse and understand the evolution and circulation of “ideas, public opinion and sentiments” (5) in the multiple publics that have historically and politically remained scattered but as parallel to each other.

Edited volumes are not often read from the beginning to the end, least of all in one sitting. Readers are more likely to pick and choose from a heterogeneous collection depending upon their respective interests. The absence of some threads running commonly throughout the disparate collection is a case of lost opportunity. The section on empowerment as a means of change for Indian women remains indistinct with very minimum effort undertaken towards understanding the cultural impediments operating therein. The diverse collection of essays could have provided the possibility of fusing the socio-economic domain with the domain of cultural politics – a gap that still exists in the contemporary Indian academia.

Manisha Banerjee and Marina Basu show how “home-bound identity” and the “mother cult” (221-222) – of imagining girls as future mothers – significantly hamper women’s educational programmes and their entrance into politics. Depicting the multiple claims towards an otherwise singular, and perhaps elitist, public sphere simultaneously reflects on a different dynamics of group formations and collective identities. Chakraborty and Bagchi write about how such “non-bourgeoisie subaltern

groups” thrusting themselves into a multilayered public sphere (117) disproves the applicability of the standard conceptions of public sphere in India. The complexities involved in undertaking such an exercise comes out most eloquently in the section on the pre-modern registry.

Anita Bagchi, Radhika Seshan and Farhat Nasreen in their respective chapters in the section remind that opening the question of public sphere in pre-modern settings has to deal with the enormous subtleties. Beyond the question of re-imagining the past, it involves making certain imaginations possible even when the past is available. The distribution of characters and the porous structures across time and space, and religions and sects including Buddhas, Jainas, the Vedics, the Bhakti movement and Islam scattered over a vast span of time across the ancient and the medieval periods brings more clarity to the imagination in two respects: first, that patriarchy as a rigid structure had indeed unfolded in a matter of over 2500 years (63), and second, even in its rigid forms, patriarchy had not remained fully successful in keeping women from entering spheres outside the private domain.

Of this, the first one especially extricates, although not entirely unproblematically, researches from imagining pre-modernity as an enclosed period, for discussions of the evolution of ideas. This in fact complicates our understanding of the past, opening up new possibilities for conceptualising gender and even its intersections with caste. In other words, if discussions on the public sphere in India have so far remained sealed off, with rare exceptions, from entering into pre-modern times, the current volume posits the dire need to ask such questions without which one is unlikely to find answers.

The volume is definitely an instance of invoking the “heterogeneous time” proposed by Partha Chatterjee once, against the homogeneous empty time of Benedict Anderson and Walter Benjamin. Gender has remained a favourite playground for Indian scholars to examine postcolonial transitions, and especially to understand nationalism and regional public spheres. The current volume certainly expands these imaginations by pushing the scope of study further back in time and outside usual modernity to shed more light on our understanding. However, given its unwieldy scope, some more conceptual consistency in editorial organization could have benefitted this otherwise scattered and unconnected collection of essays. The volume, as it is, remains eminently readable for the questions it triggers both conceptually and methodologically for reimagining the public sphere in India.